

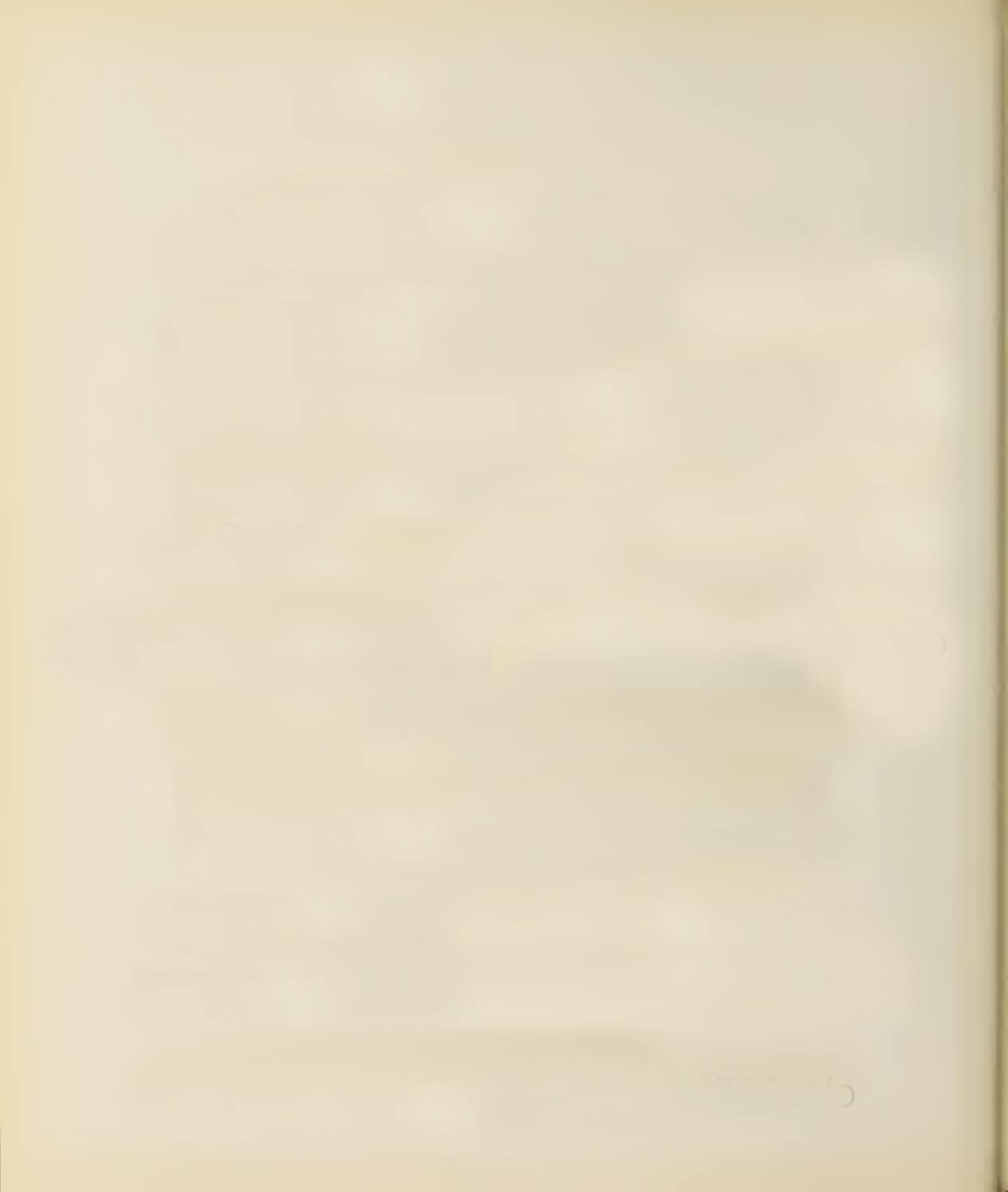
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JOAN MIRÓ: MAGNETIC FIELDS



Joan Miró

MAGNETIC FIELDS

Published by

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation,

New York, 1972

Library of Congress

Card Catalogue Number: 72-89976

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Printed in Germany

This project is supported by a grant from
the National Endowment for the Arts
in Washington, D.C., a Federal Agency.

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*Unless otherwise indicated all translations from
French into English are by the authors.*

*Jacques Dupin's book Joan Miró: Life and Work,
Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1962,
contains a catalogue of almost the entire oeuvre from 1914 to 1961.
Paintings not included in the present exhibition
but mentioned in the texts are identified by "D."
followed by the number assigned to them
in the Dupin catalogue.*

* Miss Krauss' contributions to this catalogue were in part supported by
a grant from The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

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Fig. 1. Joan Miró. *Painting*, 1925. Bavarian State Collection, Munich

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

JOAN MIRÓ is a towering figure in the landscape of modern art. It may be said of him, as of few others, that our vision—what we see as true and real in our age—would be severely impoverished without his images and his forms—a conjunction that first presented itself in the harsh context of modernism before it was so absorbed in our general awareness as to become an inseparable part of it.

Admiration for Miró and his work is not a recent attitude at the Guggenheim Museum. Seven important works have entered our permanent collection—the first as early as 1948, the most recent in 1969—and Miró, in 1958, was the recipient of the Guggenheim International Award. Despite this long-standing and reciprocated friendship with the artist, an important exhibition kept eluding us. That such an event should finally come about is therefore a source of great satisfaction, one by no means diminished by its long and complex period of gestation.

A full retrospective of Miró's work was presented in New York by The Museum of Modern Art in 1959, and I thereafter approached Miró in behalf of the Guggenheim with the proposal to show his recent work. The suggestion was immediately accepted and was confirmed during a summer visit to his studio in Palma de Majorca in 1968. In the same year, Rosalind E. Krauss, then Assistant Professor at M.I.T. submitted an intriguing exhibition plan which would extend the scope of inquiry into Miró's earlier development without falling back upon a retrospective format. Sensing a significant rhythm in the artist's evolution, she proposed to explore the visual and conceptual relationship between Miró's painting of the 1920s and that of the 1960s.

Miró received the new outline with enthusiasm. Soon it became evident that the chosen theme was more intricate and required more elaboration than had appeared at the outset. Thus, the aid of Margit Rowell, now the Guggenheim's Associate Curator, was enlisted to contribute to the formulation and the realization of the exhibition as it now stands. She had just completed a Miró monograph, published as *Miró* by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1971.

The present exhibition and its catalogue are therefore the fruits of a close and mutually enriching collaboration between Rosalind Krauss and Margit Rowell. The organizers would nevertheless have failed in their endeavour had they not been so consistently supported by Joan Miró himself and by his American and European gallery representatives: Pierre Matisse in New York and Aimé Maeght as well as Jacques Dupin in Paris. Baptized eventually as *Joan Miró: Magnetic Fields*, the exhibition made its own appeal to prospective lenders in this country and abroad who manifested their belief in the artist and in the concept of the exhibition through their generous loans.

Magnetic Fields, it should be stressed in closing, is based upon a theme which we hope will add an informative and valid insight to the enjoyment of the works here gathered. The realization of the show and this publication depended upon a concerted effort of the Guggenheim's staff and was made possible through a much needed and appreciated grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

THOMAS M. MESSER, *Director*
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum



Fig. 2. Joan Miró. *The Trail*. 1918. Collection Mr. and Mrs. Gustav Stern, New York

Rosalind E. Krauss

Because they depend on being performed, music and dance and theater engage in constant acts of self-renewal. Each performance of a work reinterprets it—recasts its accents and emotions—with no single performance ever exhausting the fund of possibilities the work contains. Compared to this, painting or poetry seem static and immutable: a constellation of images immobilized on a surface and that surface pinioned to a wall, or a sequence of phrases etched by their very fixity into the blank inertness of the page. But the inexhaustibility of poetry or painting is no less than that of the performing arts; it simply lies elsewhere. It involves a continual return to the work whose content can never be depleted, for there are always new levels of perception onto which it will open and new realms of experience which it will address. If this is true for a single painting, it is equally true of all the works that make up the art of any one man. It is true as well of Miró's art, which one always thought one knew.

Miró's work had seemed easy to visualize: an art dense with metaphor, a bestiary in which man, woman and animal exchanged substance against a background fluid with shifting colors. One thought of it as an alchemical world filled with cosmic signs, or as a place where creatures in endless metamorphosis briefly brushed against each other only to separate again and brush against the sky. It seemed to be an art that was essentially dense, populous, studded with figurative incident; an art whose internal scale was marked by the *horror vacui* of the miniaturist, even though it was sometimes projected to the mural size of the processional frieze.

Yet there is another Miró: painting that risked emptiness to court an extreme openness filled only with the pulsation of unimpeded color. Turning his back on metaphor Miró, in this phase of his painting, discovered the kind of drawing that the French call *écriture*—a descriptive line pushed toward the abstract disembodiment of the written sign. In this painting Miró developed an internal structure, based on color, which already implied a vast scale. It was a structure that had so little to do with the *esprit nouveau* of developed French Cubism that even by the mid-twenties it had dissolved the normal easel picture and had moved towards a radically expanded field.

Concentrated into two phases of Miró's career, this other aspect of his art is constituted by the 115 or so paintings which Miró made in the years 1925 to 1927, and many of the ambitious pictures he has painted since 1960. Some of the paintings have been seen before; others have neither been exhibited nor reproduced. Never have these works been brought together in a coherent way. In early discussions of Miró's art they were largely ignored. Recently this has changed. In an effort to intercept their conceptual thrust, the writers who discuss them have grouped the works according to various designations: "Dream-Pictures" is one of these;¹ another is "Automatic Painting."² For many reasons neither of these seems really correct.

¹ Jacques Dupin, the author of the most definitive study of Miró's career, collects the works of the mid-twenties under this heading, saying "the atmosphere they give off . . . is a purely oneiric atmosphere." Jacques Dupin, *Joan Miró*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1962, p. 157.

² See William Rubin, *Dada and Surrealist Art*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1969, p. 156. The exhibition *Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage*, which Mr. Rubin organized at The Museum of Modern Art in 1968, brought together a select number of these paintings for the first time in this country, focusing on their importance in Miró's œuvre.

The present exhibition collects these pictures under the title "Magnetic Fields"—and of course, like any title, there is in this one a mixture of accuracy and partisanship, of objective description and interpretation. There is as well the presence of an historical marker. For "Magnetic Fields" in French is *Les Champs magnétiques*—the name of a little book which two poets published jointly in 1920 in an attempt by the not-yet-official Surrealists to break the back of traditional literary genres. In *Les Champs magnétiques* the concern to create an uninterrupted field of language parallels the concern Miró came to by the mid-twenties: to make painting from an uninterrupted field of color. Further, both book and painting shared the problem of inventing a language which would simultaneously describe the world of objects and the opacity of the medium that renders them—whether that medium be line or words.

Five years before he composed *The Surrealist Manifesto*, André Breton collaborated with Philippe Soupault on the texts grouped together as *Les Champs magnétiques*.³ Although each of the prose sections of the *Champs* was authored singly by either Breton or Soupault, a collective strategy unifies the texts. It is a strategy bent on dispossessing the characteristic features of narrative, on revoking both the sequential ordering of events and the mood of the past tense that inevitably colors the narration of an event re-told. The voice the reader hears may be describing feelings of alienation as the author moves across the city, or memories of childhood, or the fatigue of a traveler in the depths of the countryside. But always a sense of fragmentation, an effect of incoherence dogs the description, muffling the sound of the tale to create an auditory space in which the tone of the teller, "speaking in the present," emerges at each moment of the reading. *Les Champs magnétiques* which Breton later called "the fruit of the first systematic application of automatic writing,"⁴ is an extended field of images. And the curious thing about these images is that it feels as though they are being created in the presence of the reader, at each

³ Anna Balakian argues that Breton's ideas about automatic writing were formed by his reading of Pierre Janet's *L'Automatisme psychologique*, 1889, as indeed most of his basic understanding of psychoanalytic thought depended on Janet—the leading psychiatric authority in France and the teacher of Jung. After Breton's death, Soupault disclosed to Dr. Balakian the source of the title for *Les Champs magnétiques*. It was, he said, a term used by Janet which he and Breton discovered at the same time as they happened into an exhibition in the Bois de Boulogne where there were displayed graphic representations of magnetic fields. (See Anna Balakian, *André Breton*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1971, pp. 28, 61.) One further hypothesis about why this name was attractive to the two young poets is that having steeped themselves in the poetry of Lautréamont (indeed in 1919 Breton had transcribed Lautréamont's *Poésies* from the only known copy in the Bibliothèque Nationale) and revering his *Les Chants de Maldoror* as the most intoxicating and free poetic work they knew, Breton and Soupault used *Les Champs magnétiques* as a simultaneous acronym and rhyme on the title of Lautréamont's great work. *Champs* and *chants* sound the same in French, and both titles possess the initials LCM. (For a textual comparison between the two works see Herbert Gershman, *The Surrealist Revolution in France*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1969, p. 40.)

⁴ "Incontestablement, il s'agit là du premier ouvrage surréaliste (et nullement dada) puisqu'il est le fruit des premières applications systématiques de l'écriture automatique." André Breton, *Entretiens*, Gallimard, Paris, 1952, p. 56.

moment of contact. As another Surrealist poet, Robert Desnos, was to insist somewhat later, "the sole tense of the verb is the present indicative."⁵ The immediacy of that tense was something Breton was not to relinquish. When he writes in the sequel to the *Champs*, "Less time than it takes to tell, fewer tears than it takes to die: I have counted everything, and there you are,"⁶ he drives into the flow of the conversational mode a kind of self-reflexive wedge which seems to operate in the present to transform experience into its image—to change emotion into the set of verbal signs which represent it.

The ambition of *Les Champs magnétiques* is given in the title of the first of its texts: "La Glace sans tain." The mirror without silvering was to be language that could cut two ways. It was to reflect the speaker back to himself even as it was to be transparent, allowing the speaker's subjectivity to flood past him and merge with the whole of the world outside. "Do not," Breton cautions, "disturb the genius planter of white roots, my nerve-endings in the earth."⁷ Not only was language to be exposed in its most dispersed, most flamboyant possibilities of association, but because of the presentness of the tense maintained, it was always to be laying bare its properties as language. Thus the mirror reflected back at the reader the arbitrary nature of the written sign at the same time as it displayed the magic of its transparent power to represent. "My two crossed hands represent the celestial vault and my head is a goose grotesque and bald."⁸

Automatism—the act of writing without the censorship of any preconceived structure or subject—may have been the ground-rules of *Les Champs magnétiques*, but it was not the goal Breton and Soupault were driving toward. The same is true of Miró's paintings of the mid and late twenties. There is in them, as we shall see, the ambition to create "*la glace sans tain*"—the unsilvered, or one-way mirror.

Beginning in 1925, the pictures began to come from Miró's brush at a stunning rate of speed. In the years just before, Miró's meticulous workmanship, his painstakingly wrought detail on surfaces brushed to an enamel-like smoothness and density, had meant a severely limited output.⁹ But in 1925 Miró's palette changed. The variegated colors of *The Tilled Field* and *The Harlequin's Carnival* were simplified down to monochromes of blue or sienna or bister. Miró

5 "Le seul temps du verbe est l'indicatif présent," Robert Desnos, "Confession d'un enfant du siècle," *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no. 6, March 1926, p. 18.

6 From *Poisson soluble*: "Moins de temps qu'il n'en faut pour le dire, moins de larmes qu'il n'en faut pour mourir: j'ai tout compté, voilà." André Breton, *Manifeste du Surréalisme/Poisson soluble*, Editions du Sagittaire, Paris, 1924, p. 84. Translation by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane in the 1969 edition, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

7 "Ne dérangez pas le génie planteur de racines blanches, mes terminaisons nerveuses sous terre." *Les Champs magnétiques*. Gallimard, Paris, 1967 edition, p. 85.

8 "Mes deux mains croisées représentent la voûte céleste et ma tête est une oie grotesque et chauve." *Ibid.*, p. 77.

9 In an interview, Miró said that from 1920 to 1922 he had produced only three or four pictures a year. See Pierre Schneider, "Miró," *Horizon*, vol. 1, no. 4, March 1959, pp. 70–81.

applied these colors in radically thinned washes over the whole surface of the canvas. Within these loosely-brushed expanses, Miró traced a sequence of images which he executed in hair-thin lines of astonishing circumspection and reticence. It was as though part of Miró's thinking in these paintings was focused on the problem of how to deprive line of its "natural" weight. A line that was allowed to curve back on itself to close the contour of a figure would interrupt the liquidity of the color field, damming its flow by the suggestion of a corporeal presence. The same is true of a line that is shaded or thick: it would infiltrate the space of these pictures with references to the physical world where the density of mass is underlined by the shadow it casts or the matter it displaces.

Consequently Miró's line turns away from description in these paintings, and becomes something else. In places it is perforated, a dotted line marking an object's placement within the space of the picture, without however embodying the object (as in *The Siesta*, cat. no. 15). Elsewhere (in *Head of a Catalan Peasant*, cat. no. 9) it straightens and elongates as two axes, north/south and east/west, crossing at the center of the pictorial field—the vertical one surmounted by a small red shape which is the cap of the Catalan peasant. Through the cross which serves as the painting's structure, the body is represented without being materialized. At other places the line becomes pictograph, charging the field with Miró's own special meanings and associations: the ladder with converging uprights (as in *Landscape with Rooster* and *Landscape called The Grasshopper*, cat. no. 24) becomes a sign for the visual continuities that run like currents through the very depths of space; the circle or point with flame-like appendages is a sign for sexual excitement (in *The Kiss*, cat. no. 6 and *Romeo and Juliet*, cat. no. 20). In still other places the line becomes simply writing—a poem or a phrase stretching across the field ("*Le corps de ma brune . . .*," cat. no. 15). And indeed it is in the context of the written word that line is most characteristically stripped of weight to become the non-descriptive, non-pictorial carrier of meaning. For the reader knows without thinking that the letters which make up the written word are abstract signs and not objects, inhabiting a world of signification rather than a world of mimesis.

It is the consistency with which Miró addresses himself to this question of the pictorial function of his line, and the originality of his use of it to structure an open, luminous field, that constitute the formal revelation of these pictures. Indeed it is this clear concentration or focus of Miró's formal intelligence within these works that makes the description of them as "dream" or "automatic" pictures so unsatisfactory. Just as Breton tended to obscure the formal issues in *Les Champs magnétiques* behind the cloudy notion of "automatic writing," Miró has also side-tracked questions about the structure of his work in the mid-twenties. Miró has said that at a point in his career just previous to these pictures he made a series of drawings while in a state of hunger-induced hallucination.¹⁰ He has also spoken of the effect of both images made by rapid

¹⁰ "For *The Harlequin's Carnival*, I made many drawings into which I put the hallucinations provoked by my hunger." Joan Miró, "Je rêve d'un grand atelier," *XXe siècle*, vol. 1, no. 2, May-June 1958, p. 27.

random drawing¹¹ and hypnogogic images¹² on a few of the "magnetic field" pictures. As well, he has indicated that the conditions of the dream state form part of the *content* of these works, particularly the ones on blue grounds.¹³ But it is the radical formal integration of these paintings that testifies to the high level of consciousness operating on them as a whole. The thought-process behind Miró's pictorial use of the sign, which this text will take up in some detail,¹⁴ was not carried on in a trance-like loss of control. And further, the use of a large number of specific, carefully selected visual and poetic sources—discussed elsewhere in this catalogue¹⁵—bears witness to a high degree of thought about the image's meaning. In the paintings of this period Miró was no more an automatic painter than Kandinsky or Matisse or Klee—and no less.

The question that haunts these pictures is the one of space. Their roots are in Miró's earlier work with the specific, real space of landscape; their apotheosis is in a return to landscape, but at an entirely new level of formal thinking. To move from the first stage to the last involved Miró in the problem of how to represent space without constructing an illusion of it.

The distinction between those two things, representation and illusionism, was important for Miró. It is a distinction which turns on the strangely asymmetrical relationship between representation and resemblance. We speak of a picture as representing one or a group of objects; a portrait, for example, is said to represent its sitter. And the success of the portrait as a representation is thought to lie in the closeness of the resemblance. But the seeming correspondence between resemblance and representation is in fact misleading. Two things which resemble each other almost absolutely—a pair of twins for example, or two copies of the same book—cannot be said to represent one another. And conversely, an object may be represented by something which does not resemble it at all—a country by its flag, or the color red by the word "red". In

11 Miró described the genesis of "*Oh! un de ces messieurs . . .*" in conversation with the authors, as an example of this. See discussion, cat. no. 12.

12 Discussing a 1925 untitled work (Fig. 1), now in the Bavarian State Museum in Munich, Miró told the authors that its dotted comma-shaped forms and spirals recreated the phantom images which, in a half-waking state, he saw as if projected on the ceiling of his room.

13 See Margit Rowell's discussion of "*Photo: ceci est la couleur de mes rêves.*" pp. 60 ff., below.

14 In 1958 Miró was asked if he thought of his paintings as ideograms. "Yes," he replied, "they are ideograms." (See Edouard Roditi, "Miró Interview," *Arts*, vol. 55, no. 1, October 1958, p. 48.) There is a long tradition of describing the objects within Miró's paintings as symbols or signs constituting an ideogram, yet the way these signs might function either conceptually or formally is never made clear. See: Michel Leiris, "Joan Miró," *Documents*, no. 5, October 1929, p. 265, and *The Prints of Joan Miró*, Curt Valentin, New York, 1947, p. 2; Georges Hugnet, "Joan Miró ou l'enfance de l'art," *Cahiers d'art*, nos. 5-10, 1951, p. 556; Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, *Joan Miró*, Maeght, Paris, 1956, p. 77; Jacques Dupin, *op. cit.*, pp. 158 and 175; and Cirici-Pellicer, *Miró en su obra*, Nueva colección labor, Barcelona, 1970.

15 For the visual sources see pp. 29-51, below. For the poetic sources, see Margit Rowell's text below.

fact, it is impossible for a representation to coincide completely with the thing represented.¹⁶

Yet illusionistic painting blurs the difference between representation and resemblance, trying to match up this thing in the picture with that thing in the world. In that sense it is like naturalistic writing which does not wish to call attention to the arbitrariness of the medium in which it is made. Part of the burden of *Les Champs magnétiques* had been to create the "unsilvered mirror," to use words to show the distance between resemblance and language. By the mid-twenties Miró, too, had moved far away from thinking of painting as a matter of resemblances. Rather, it had become for him a task of representation which is "naturally" somewhere else. In 1925, Miró had finally pushed the representation of space into that other place which is primarily the domain of the sign. It was a long push that began in his work in the late teens, and one can follow its course step by step.

From *The Trail* of 1918 (fig. 2) to *Lines and Olive Trees* of the following year, to *The Farm* of 1921-22 (fig. 22), to the earliest work in this exhibition, *The Tilled Field* of 1925-24 (cat. no. 1), there is a continuous transformation of the means that Miró uses to describe the landscape's space. The sandy soil of *The Trail* is modeled in delicate blues and pinks to describe the furrows and ruts which mark its terrain. But because these parallel furrows also form a loose system of converging lines, the depiction of the actual ground doubles as a representation of perspective. So that the conventional pictorial system for describing deep space appears to be mapped onto an illusion of deep space. Perspective itself thus begins to surface as a flat pattern of convergence fused somewhat arbitrarily with the natural forms of the shifting soil.

This progressive transformation of perspective into the appearance of an arbitrary pattern deepens throughout the work Miró executed between 1918 and 1925. In *The Tilled Field*, depth is largely stylized into separate systems of parallel lines that enact the rows of furrows raised by the farmer's plow. In places these patterns seem to support the perspective convention which grounds Western illusionism, for in the middle section of the work, they are directed diagonally toward what would be the vanishing point at the center of the painting. But at the left and right of the picture they read simply as vertical and horizontal striations, resolutely disconnected from any one overriding strategy of organizing the depth of the work. Instead they participate in the kind of description Miró had seen in Medieval Catalan fresco painting, where depth is symbolized in the flat rather than absorbed into a system of illusion.¹⁷

In *The Hunter* (cat. no. 2), painted just after *The Tilled Field*, this flattening of space into descriptive sign is carried out by color rather than pattern. The closeness of value between pale

¹⁶ This discussion depends in large part on Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1968, p. 6 ff., where it is much more closely argued.

¹⁷ This kind of patterning of the field appears, for example, in the *Creation Tapestry* from the Gerona Cathedral (fig. 15), where there is also an arrangement and a stylization of the animals grouped around the body of water which suggests the composition of the lower right side of *The Tilled Field*. Another device from Catalan Romanesque frescoes is suggestive for this painting: the decoration of the bodies of the evangelists with disembodied eyes in the cycle from Sant Climent de Taüll (fig. 24).



Fig. 3. *Tapestry of the Creation*, Gerona Cathedral, Spain, X-XI centuries. Detail

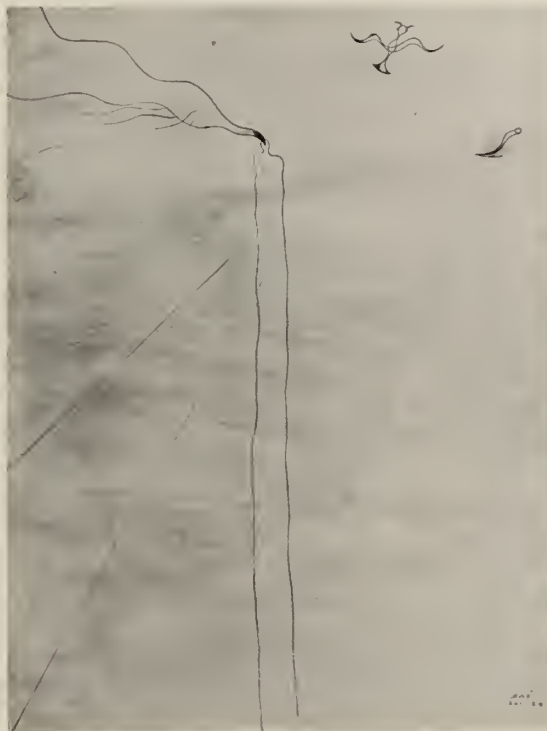


Fig. 4. Joan Miró. *Composition*. 1924. Collection Annely Juda Fine Art, London

pink ground and yellow sea and sky creates a continuous fabric seamed at their line of meeting—a continuous fabric on which near and far begin to take on a kind of equivalence. A strange loss of scale-difference further drains illusionism from the painting, as all of the solid elements within it are drawn approximately the same size. The head and tail of the fish in the foreground, the gun held by the hunter standing further back, the boat riding the distant sea, the sun, the letters SARD in the lower right corner—all occupy about the same area of the work's surface: all seem to have the same visual weight. At the same time, the connective tissue between these elements—the bodies of animals and men—has been eaten away, reduced to a sequence of fine, stem-like graphisms. Straight, wavy, perforated, these lines tend to disembody the objects which people *The Hunter*, to deprive them of mass, to push them toward habitation within the weightless ideographic space of the diagram.

There is thus a double indeterminacy within the luminous space of *The Hunter*. There is a visual indeterminacy in relation to the placement of objects—as “near” and “far” seem to shift like so many currents within the fluidity of the color field. And there is a strange indeterminacy as to the representational mode being used. For the traditional worlds of naturalistic, diagrammatic, and verbal description are no longer separate worlds. Instead they seem to converge in a space in which words take on the weight and density of objects, and objects reach for the spatially non-corporeal quality of the mechanical or anatomical diagram.¹⁸ *The Hunter* is the first of Miró's long series of tense syntheses of the normally separate spaces of looking and reading. In the works that follow it, Miró performs this synthesis with an increasing simplicity.

To discover that economy of means, one has simply to turn to the 1925 *Head of a Catalan Peasant* (cat. no. 9). Entirely flooded by an unevenly brushed wash of cerulean blue, the field of this painting makes only one concession to the worldly distinction between earth and sky. A fine black line with a small knob at its left terminus bisects the field horizontally. Its effects is to conjure up that perceptual crease in the fabric of real space which is the line of the horizon. Somewhat left of center another line—this one vertical—moves upward from the bottom edge of the canvas. Near the top of the painting this line attaches itself to a small red and white form that depicts the knitted cap of the peasant as a shape resembling a reversed question-mark. At the upper right corner a brief red streak hovers over one white and two black dots in a figuration like a skewed exclamation point. A small black shooting star sputtering trails of dotted lines and a smaller white star complete the work.

The simplicity of that crossed pair of lines unites at least four readings of the picture which resonate back and forth within the blue expanse of its field. Briefly, these are: line as the means of drawing objects; line as the mechanism of depicting space (by separating figure from ground); line as writing (with the temporal associations of the way signs are read); and line as surface-structure (with the instantaneous, spatial qualities of the way pictures are seen). Within the painting, each of these readings acts as a separate argument about the nature of representa-

¹⁸ The kind of diagrammatic drawing that appears here owes much to the kind of drawings with which Picabia was illustrating his magazines *391* and *Cannibale*. Miró explicitly uses Picabia's automata in other of his works from 1924, for example *Pastoral* (cat. no. 5).

tion. But because each is constructed from the same elements as the others, all readings stand in an absolute parity—opening onto each other, flowing into each other within the visual fluidity of the blue wash.

Initially one reads the crossed lines as an integral unit—a standing figure with its arms outstretched, reaching laterally towards the outer boundaries of its pictorial world. But a second reading insinuates an undefined distance between the two axes by making the horizontal one reconfirm the color depth of the field and appear as a horizon line. This reading drives a perceptual wedge between the isolated vertical of a body in the foreground and the horizon line which is associated with the furthest reaches of the color space.¹⁹ Like a taut bow-string resonating under the viewer's very act of looking, the picture's horizontal axis pulses between its proximate position as part of the figure and its infinite one as an outpost of space. In that constant flex of the blue field as it opens up and closes down, one seems to become witness to the reflexive act of consciousness that is the beginning of Western pictorial illusion—as the sign is torn from the indeterminate space of the ideogram and invested with the determination of near figure against distant ground. The continual shift backwards and forwards is thus between recognizing an object and giving it a space.

The second two readings parallel these first two, except that here the shift is between line as the bearer of meaning and line as the means to formal structure. In the context of the verbal signs which surround it—the reversed question mark and the exclamation point—the attenuated figure seems to exist in the pictographic, non-dimensional space of line hovering at the birth of writing. Yet this reading, too, flows directly into another which is its opposite. For the crossed axes exist as a rudimentary schema of perspective, a bifurcated horizon line which divides the illusioned world into left and right, up and down, at the same time as it sections the flat field of the canvas into four quadrants. Becoming a sign for the space that is *internal* to painting, it locates a point of focus, and equates the legibility of the visible world with the organization of the rectilinear picture surface.

In the first pair of readings the diastole of the line opens and closes the space of the field; in the second pair it transforms and retransforms the field itself—associating it now with the non-specific space of the page, now with the absolute specificity of the unique picture (and by extension with the specificity of the space of the natural world).

¹⁹ A 1924 drawing (fig. 4) depicts the single, detached vertical of the body against a perspective into depth drawn by three converging lines. Not only does the drawing present in its clearest form Miró's structure of the vertical bisecting the canvas, crossed by a schema for depth, it also relates to the developing personal image-language Miró was increasingly to use. The vertical figure is at one and the same time a candle and a human body, flowing hair doubling as flame. (In 1924 Miró also punned visually on the female body represented as a kerosene lamp. See discussion, cat. nos. 3, 20.) Further, the perspective schema coming in from the corners of the page is repeated in later works (fig. 14), where it is absorbed into a symbolic language.

Jacques Dupin sees the 1924 *Portrait of Madame K.* as showing a body composed of crossed axes which follow "the dimensions of the painting," and speaks of the axes as relating to the landscape: the vertical connecting earth and sky, the horizontal an "equinoctial equator." Dupin, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–47.

What Miró has created here is a pictorial mobility that does not simply imitate the naturally fluid media of water, for example, or air. It is a medium in which states of being rather than physical things seem to meet and exchange places. It is like "*la glace sans tain*": the space of a consciousness which can contemplate an endless chain of associations moving from verbal to visual symbol systems and at the same time never lose a grip on its own objective identity. The essential constituents of this space are: the liberation of color into field; a weightless, calligraphic line; and the simultaneous use of the image as sign and structure.

Behind this fluid, shifting space which Miró created, alone among his contemporaries, one hears the echo of the poets whom he most loved and admired. One hears Eluard's "Clasped hands have no weight,"²⁰ and thinks of Miró's line. Or further back there is Mallarmé's imagery of horizontal transformation:

*Fertige! voici que frissonne
L'espace comme un grand baiser*

....

*Sens-tu le paradis farouche
Ainsi qu'un rire enseveli
Se couler du coin de la bouche
Au fond de l'unanime pli!²¹*

*O intoxication! Space quivers
Like a great kiss*

....

*Do you feel the diffident paradise
Like entombed laughter
Flowing from the corner of your mouth
Into the universal wrinkle?*

²⁰ "Mains qui s'étreignent ne pèsent rien." Translated in Marcel Raymond, *From Baudelaire to Surrealism*, Methuen and Co., London, 1950, p. 283.

²¹ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Poésies*, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 72. From the poem "Autre éventail." Translated in Raymond, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

And there is Rimbaud's imagery of sensuously weightless fall:

*La douceur fleurie des étoiles et du ciel du reste descend en face du talus, comme un panier, contre notre face, et fait l'abîme fleurant et bleu là-dessous.*²²

Across from the hillside, the flowery sweetness of the stars, and of the sky, and of the rest descends upon our face like a basket; and creates the blossoming, blue abyss below.

This was the poetic context in which Miró centered his art, as daily he sought out the young poets of the *Littérature* group and silently he attended the discussions in which they mapped out their poetic concerns.²³ Their company was as important to him as that of fellow painters, and in all of his interviews, Miró stresses the centrality of poetry for him—naming Rimbaud and Jarry, Eluard and Apollinaire. Indeed, of all the visual sources to which one could possibly turn to find the grounds on which Miró built his art of the mid-twenties, the most important is surely the visual/verbal redoubling of that aberrant poetic form which is the *calligramme*. Formed in the shape of an object, the *calligramme* actually looks like the thing the words describe. (See figs. 5–7.) Of all the work of Miró's fellow painters, the only two things which really seem to have been crucial to his formal thinking in these pictures were: a little book of Klee reproductions which André Masson showed Miró in 1924, and a stage set by Picasso for the ballet *Mercure* in the same year. But the importance of these two seems to reside in the fact that they gave Miró a kind of access to the *calligramme*, hinting to him a way to integrate it into his art.

Although the *calligramme* is an ancient form²⁴ it entered the consciousness of this century's poets and painters through the efforts of Guillaume Apollinaire. Although the volume titled *Calligrammes* was not published until 1918, Apollinaire's poems in this medium had begun to appear in avant-garde journals like *Les Soirées de Paris* and *SIC* as early as 1914.²⁵ Following Apollinaire's lead, other writers attempted this form, for example Pierre Albert-Birot (the editor of *SIC*), who had published his own work in the medium by 1918. In 1917 the *calligrammes* of Vincent Huidobro mark the spread of the genre into the advanced literary circles of

²² Wallace Fowlie (translation, introduction and notes by), *Rimbaud, Complete Works, Selected Letters*, University of Chicago, 1970, p. 248. For Miró's notion of the "blue abyss" see discussion, p. 61.

²³ Miró said of 1925, "I went quite a bit that year with poets because I felt that it was necessary to go a step beyond the strictly plastic and bring some poetry into painting." Miró, "Je rêve d'un grand atelier," *op. cit.*, p. 26.

²⁴ In 1925 *L'Esprit nouveau* published *calligrammes* from the third century B. C., and from the 14th and 18th centuries, in an article titled "Les Ancêtres des idéogrammes." See *L'Esprit nouveau*, no. 27, 1925.

²⁵ In *Les Soirées de Paris* on June 15, 1914 and in *SIC* throughout 1916.

Il pleut

Il pleut des volx de
 fées comme si
 elles étaient mortes
 même dans le souvenir
 et ces nuages cabrés
 pleurent merveilleuses
 rencontres de ma vie
 où gouttelettes
 écoule tout comber
 les liens que l'oreille
 regrette et le d'adain
 pleurent une ancienne
 musique

Fig. 5. Guillaume Apollinaire. *Il Pleut*. 1917

Spain (fig. 6).²⁶ Miró's knowledge of the *calligramme* surely had begun even before he left Barcelona for Paris. By 1925 the *calligramme* had already been lifted out of whatever possible obscurity remained to it and canonized as part of the official sensibility of *L'Esprit nouveau*, in the issue dedicated to Apollinaire.²⁷

Very simply, the *calligramme* is a poem which creates an image simultaneously in visual and verbal form. Michel Foucault observes of the *calligramme* that it takes the muteness of the line which bounds the drawn figure and makes it speak by filling it with words; and takes the spatial indifference of words written on a page and makes them bow to the law of simultaneous form which operates within the world of vision. Foucault continues:

For the instantaneous glance reduces phoneticism to being only a kind of grey chatter which completes the contours of a figure; but it makes of the drawing the thin envelope which one must tear open in order to follow—from word to word—the unwinding of its textual insides . . . The calligramme makes use of the property of letters by which they are simultaneously linear elements which one can arrange in space, and signs which must unroll according to the special chain of the aural substance. As a sign, the letter permits the fixing of words; as a line it permits the figuration of objects. In this way the calligramme seems to efface the oldest oppositions of alphabetic civilization: showing and naming; drawing and speaking; reproducing and articulating; imitating and signifying; looking and reading.

*Capturing or enclosing twice the thing of which it speaks, it holds it in the most perfect trap. It guarantees this capture by its double entry of which discourse by itself or pure drawing is not capable. It conjures up the invincible absence which words cannot succeed in overcoming, in imposing on them, by the ruse of a text played out in space, the visible form of their referent: cannily deployed on the sheet of paper, the signs call forth the very things of which they speak by means of the external margin of their design, the cutting out of their mass on the empty space of the page. And in return, the visible form is hollowed out by writing, ripped up by the words which work from the inside of the form, and which, conjuring up the immobile, ambiguous, unnamable presence, make a network of significations gush forth which baptize, determine, fix the form within the form within the universe of discourse.*²⁸

In Miró's "*Un oiseau poursuit une abeille et la baise*" (cat. no. 25), the operation of the inscribed words is close to that of the *calligramme*, yet the result is—like that of *Head of a Catalan Peasant*—that Miró's line works at the level of pictorial *structure* as well as that of verbal/visual conflation. Functioning within two separate systems, the words identify parts of

²⁶ Vincent Huidobro, *Horizon carré*, Paris, 1917. This was a simultaneous French-Spanish edition.

²⁷ *L'Esprit nouveau*, no. 26, 1925.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," *Cahiers du chemin*, January 1968, pp. 84–85.

Paysage

Le soir on se promènera sur des routes parallèles

L'ARBRE
 ETAIT
 PLUS
 HAUT
 QUE LA
 MONTAGNE

MAIS LA
 MONTAGNE

LE FLEUVE
 QUI COULF
 NE PORTE
 PAS DE
 POISSONS

ATTENTION A NE PAS
 JOUER SUR L'HERBE
 FRANCHEMENT PEINTE

Une chanson conduit les brebis vers l'étable

La lune
 ou
 tu le regardes

Vincente HUIDOBRO

La cravate et la montre

LA CRAVATE
 DOU
 LOU
 REUSE
 QUE TU
 PORTES
 ET QUI T'
 ORNE O CI
 VILISÉ
 OIE- TU VEUX
 LA BIEN
 SI RESPI
 RER

COMME L'ON
 S'AMUSE
 BI
 EN

les heures

la

et le
 vers
 dantesque
 luisant et
 cadavérique

Mon cœur

beau

de

la

les yeux vie

pas

se

l'enfant la

dou

leur

Agla de

mou

rir

la main

semaine

Tircis

le bel
 inconnu

les Muses
 aux portes de
 ton corps

l'infini
 redressé
 par un fou
 de philosophe

Il est — Et tout
 5 en se ra
 fin fi ni

Fig. 6. Vincente Huidobro. *Paysage*. 1919

Fig. 7. Guillaume Apollinaire. *La cravate et la montre*. 1914

the canvas as up and down, and near and far. On the level of literal meaning, "*un oiseau*" (a bird) fixes the upper reaches of the canvas as sky; while "*baisse*" (lower) asserts the downward pull of the picture's lower half. But the calligraphy also establishes its visual identity as drawing due to the size difference between the smaller and finer depiction of "*un oiseau*" and the larger and heavier script of "*et la baisse*." This pictorial nature of the space is further enhanced by the three circular areas of color—blue, yellow, and white—which seem to overlap one another within the space of the field, receding one behind the other even while they are also manifestly applied to the raw canvas surface. Linking these three areas through the illusioned depth of the picture's space, the attenuated calligraphy of "*poursuit*" becomes a simultaneously visual/verbal image of flight or recession. Like a purely visual element, it draws a linear diagonal which binds together the field's total presentness. In its capacity as a word, it predicates the relationship between subject and object. And throughout, the doubleness of these visual/verbal elements underscores and is underscored by the dual meaning of the phrase itself.²⁹

If the *calligramme* establishes two of the poles of Miró's line—between which the spectator can pass from reading to looking and back again—the *calligramme* does not relate to the other two poles between which Miró forces his line to oscillate in order to deal with painting *per se*. Along that second continuum Miró uses *écriture* to assert the depth of the field and to structure that field according to a formal logic. "*Poursuit*" after all does more than just denote an action which the gestural writing echoes through mime. It also serves as a diagonal fulcrum balancing the sign for perspective recession against a transverse segmentation of the flat plane. Thus "*poursuit*" performs on the level of structure, like the multiplex cross in *Head of a Catalan Peasant* which 1) underscores a recession deep into space through the arms/horizon line, and 2) suggests a necessary connection between the conventional ways of transferring real space onto a flat plane (perspective) and the conventional format of the picture's shape (a rectangle bisected horizontally and vertically). As a simple silhouette, floating in a neutral space, the *calligramme* cannot address itself to either of these issues. The *calligramme*, therefore, can be understood as only a partial source for the pictorial invention one finds in the "magnetic fields."

It might appear that there is an obvious place one could turn to find words or lettering used for that function of pictorial structure: namely, collage and its literary off-shoot, concrete poetry. But it seems clear that the use of lettering and words in Cubist and Dadaist contexts has in fact little to do with the formal meaning of Miró's *écriture*.

Beginning in 1911–12 in the collages of Picasso and Braque, words and word-fragments stencilled onto the canvas began to fluctuate forwards and backwards within the picture field. Associating themselves with an object located inside the space of the painting—serving for example as the label of a bottle or as the heading of a newspaper foreshortened on a table—the letters also proclaimed themselves to be appliquéd upon the surface of the picture. Laying siege to two positions at once, the lettering seemed to be inside the picture as well as on its surface.

²⁹ See Margit Rowell's essay, pp. 58–60 below.

A similar kind of fluctuation occurs in the world of concrete poetry. There, shifts in typography, from fine italicized print to extreme bold-face, situate the letters of the poem in layers of varying depth within the page and at the same time proclaim the mute fact of the word or letter as a concrete object stranded in space, blocked off from the linear flow of the written line. In both these forms the word is made into a physical thing (whether pinned to the surface or projected into depth). And this tends to strip it of any resonance of associative meaning. Remaining inert like a label, the word literally becomes an object.

In Miró's art of the twenties, words are never divorced from their meanings. In fact they are given double and sometimes triple associations (like the verb form "*baisse*" in the painting "*Un oiseau poursuit une abeille et la baisse*," which is made to read "lower," "lay" and "embrace"). But unlike Miró's notion of the way words should function within painting, concrete poetry, beginning with the Futurism of Marinetti (fig. 8) and continuing through to Dada, forced and celebrated a loosening of the ties between words and their meanings. In an ironic jibe at the dissociation of concrete poetry, Louis Aragon composed a little work in that genre in 1920:

Suicide

A b c d e f
g h i j k l
m n o p q r
s t u v w
*x y z.*³⁰

If neither collage nor concrete poetry really open onto the special landscape of Miró's achievement of the mid-twenties, this is due in part to the distance they enforced between language and its meaning. But it also involves the fact that the word-as-object could neither (in collage) single-handedly structure a space, nor (in concrete poetry) achieve a fluidity between the word and the pictorial meaning of the space it occupied.

The conceptual distance between "*Un oiseau poursuit . . .*" and Marinetti's *Paroles en liberté* (Words in Freedom) has to do with Miró's consideration for conventional meanings and his sensitivity to the associative flexibility of line. Although concretist poetry does not seem to be very suggestive, then, as a source of Miró's use of the sign, there is one work from the pre-history of concrete poetry that is an exception: Christian Morgenstern's *Fishes' Night Song* (Fig. 9). Because that poem resists the objectification of the letter as such, remaining instead in the world of pre-literate calligraphy, the lines which constitute it retain the character of drawing. Each unit of the poem possesses the quality of a primitive sign surfacing from the world of resemblance onto the field of representation, able to make the reader acutely conscious of the actual act of writing/drawing. Consequently the field of the poem calls several things to mind

**Fisches
Nachtgesang.**



Fig. 9. Christian Morgenstern.
Fisches Nachtgesang. 1906

³⁰ *Cannibale*, no. 1, April 25, 1920.



Fig. 8. F.T. Marinetti. *Paroles en liberté*



Fig. 10. Paul Klee, *Order of the High C*, 1921. Penrose Collection, London

at once: the form of the fish—in its shape and symbolization of scales and fins; the shimmering ambient of the animal—in its suggestion of the surface of water; and the linear organization of writing on a page (specifically the writing of poetry since the signs Morgenstern uses are the signs for metric feet: the iamb and the dactyl). It is this kind of multiplicity due to the pre-verbal character of the signs Morgenstern uses that is suggestive for Miró's own work.

Published in Germany in 1905 as part of the *Galgenlieder* (or gallows songs), *Fishes' Night Song* almost immediately achieved total currency among literate Europeans. Paul Klee certainly knew it, and by the late teens and early twenties, Klee's art abounded with pre-verbal signs like arrows, dotted spirals and exclamation points. Within the luminous segments of broken color which comprised the field of Klee's paintings, these signs operated in an extremely pictorial way (fig. 11). Establishing directions through the space of the field, they played a role in structuring it. Further, Klee integrated the signs within the space of his landscapes, maintaining a parity between them and the other graphic elements in the paintings. Suspended midway between drawing and writing, between deep space and the picture surface, Klee's signs were highly suggestive for the way Miró was to develop his own special use of line.³¹ Yet Klee never risked the openness of the color field that Miró demanded for his own art, nor the use of the sign as the total structuring element, nor the possibilities of scale which these two factors could combine to produce.

Indeed, the artifact that most nearly intersected with Miró's own drive for internal openness of color and large scale was the backdrop which Picasso produced for the opening act of the ballet *Mercure* in 1924. In December of that year, in the first issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Max Morise wrote: "A word is written, and it is not far from the idea of a star to the word 'star,' to the symbolic sign which the inscription STAR attributes to it. I am thinking of the décor by Picasso for *Mercure* which represented night. In the sky not single star; only the written word sparkling there many times."³² Picasso's backdrop was a blue ground. At its center was a schematic, fine-line rendering of a woman reclining on a dias. On the backdrop around her was sprinkled in several places the word "étoile." (See fig. 12.) By 1924 the Surrealists who hailed Picasso's set as a great innovation³³ had seen a lot of writing in pictorial and quasi-pictorial contexts. But the source of the freshness and excitement of *Mercure* was the way the word seemed to be absorbed deep into the visual context as the fleeting and evanescent idea of the star, enveloped by, and at the same time creating, the luminous field which it defined.

³¹ The most direct connection between Klee and Miró in 1925 occurs in the painting "Amour" (fig. 17) where letters issue from the hole at the lower right of the oval field. The similarity between this and the treatment in Klee's *Order of the High C*, 1921 (fig. 10), where a letter issues from a point in the lower right of the pale oval face is suggestive. The Klee watercolor originally belonged to Paul Eluard who owned several Klees in the early 1920s. There is, then, a likelihood that Miró knew this particular work by Klee and that it might have affected the composition of "Amour."

³² Max Morise, "Les Yeux enchantés," *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no. 1, December 1924, p. 26.

³³ "Hommage à Pablo Picasso," 391, no. 18, July 1924, p. 3. A statement signed among others by: Aragon, Breton, Desnos, Ernst, Pierre Naville, Benjamin Péret, Philippe Soupault. This piece was also published as a letter in *Paris-Journal*, June 20, 1924, two days after the Massine production of *Mercure* opened.

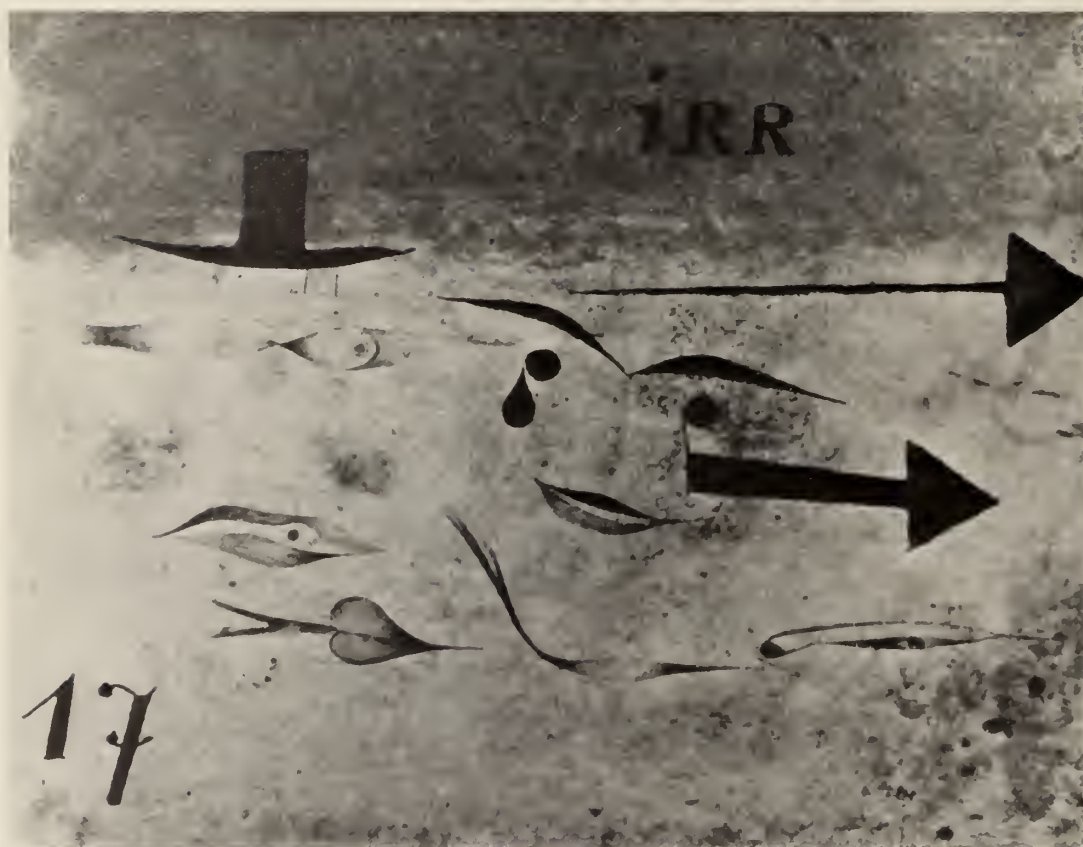


Fig. 11. Paul Klee, *Seventeen Gone Astray*, 1925. Collection Kunstmuseum, Basel

In 1925, the year following Picasso's set for *Mercury*, Miró was to paint a number of works where open grounds were shaped by the relationship of visual symbols and writing. "*Etoiles en des sexes d'escargot*" (cat. no. 11) is one of these;³⁴ another is *The Siesta* (cat. no. 13); and still another is "*Sable*" (cat. no. 21). In the case of "*Sable*" Miró identifies each of the four quadrants of the picture field with a symbol of the four natural elements: a pictographic representation of waves for water; a schematic drawing of a tiny boat with an enormous sail for air; a system of dotted lines issuing from Miró's symbol of the sun's rays for fire—in this case heat; and the word "*Sable*" for the earth or sand. Not only do these pictographs or signs identify the section of ground which they seem to stake out in the flat of the picture field, but they also participate in a representation of space which is simultaneously ideographic and visual. For each of the four elements presents the notion of spatial recession to the eye of the beholder/reader: the three converging lines of the sail imply recession into the upper left corner of the painting; the point towards which the perforated lines direct themselves implies a movement toward the upper right; the parallelism of the sign for waves converges towards the left edge of the canvas; while the letters which inscribe "*Sable*" onto the field increase in size moving towards the right. Instead of a pictorial field which, like a normal landscape, establishes a single vanishing point, Miró constructs a schema for a fan-like perspective, with vanishing points gravitating towards each of the picture's four corners. And the effect is to both structure and set into motion the variegated wash of the ground.

In the mid and late twenties Miró's problem was, then, to invent a kind of drawing that would not serve to outline objects. He had to find a way to draw that would serve as *écriture*, and it is on the deep level of drawing as writing that Miró made his formal connection to poetry.^{34a}

By 1925 when Miró had begun his investigations into the relationship between drawing and writing, two other painters in the Surrealist orbit had already produced work which made use of words. These were Picabia and Max Ernst. Not only had Picabia used lettering to re-enforce the weightless, diagrammatic quality of his line in works which he assimilated into the special diction of the mechanical drawing (fig. 19), but he had also employed the symbol of the wheel in a way that Miró was to adopt in many of the paintings in the mid and late twenties.

The iconography of Ernst's Dada collages³⁵ as well as that of the work he did in conjunction with the poet Paul Eluard also seems to have affected Miró. Not only is there Ernst's image of the pierced, disembodied eye (fig. 26) which appeared in 1922 as the first graphic image of Eluard's collection of poetry, *Répétitions* (and which shows up shortly thereafter in *The*

³⁴ For discussion, see pp. 57–8, below.

^{34a} For the connection between Miró's formal ambitions and his use of actual poetic content, see pp. 68–9 below.

³⁵ Throughout Ernst's collages in the late teens, the wheel is a central image. In addition Ernst's 1920 painting *Dada-Gauguin* contains a strange image of a cactus at its left, which may have affected Miró's own cactus image in *The Tilled Field* (cat. no. 1), as well as a phallic form at the picture's center which shows up in Miró's phallic-like designation of the standing figure in works like *Drawing* (fig. 4).

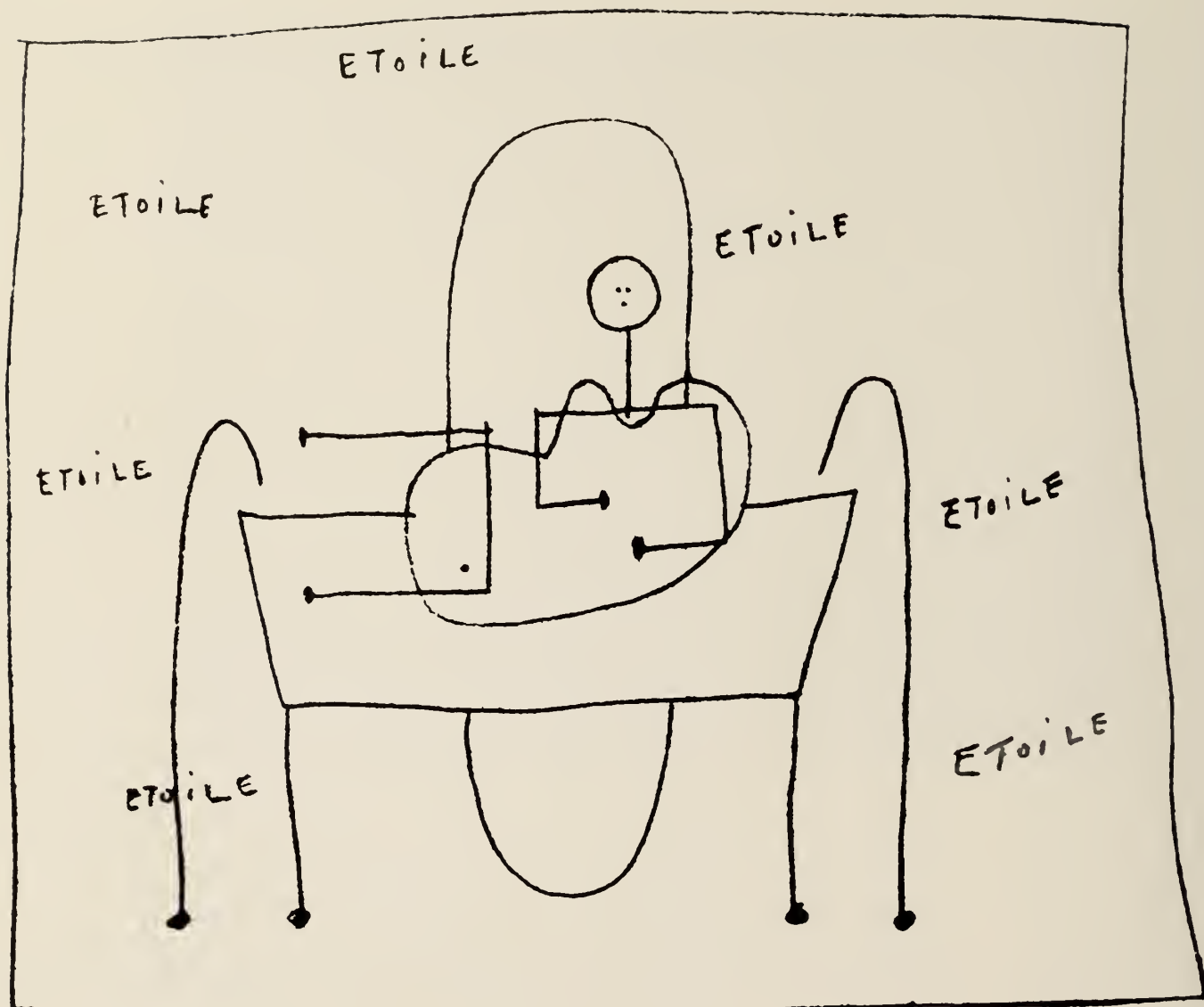


Fig. 12. Pablo Picasso. Sketch for *Mercure*. 1924.

Hunter).³⁶ There is also the isolated ear (later to become so prominently a part of *The Tilled Field*),³⁷ which Ernst first uses in his image for "*Le nettoyage des carreaux . . .*" (fig. 25) from the 1922 edition of Eluard's *Les Malheurs des immortels*, and which reappears in the frescoes he painted for Eluard's house in Eaubonne in 1922–25.³⁸

Admiring Eluard as he did, Miró seems to have looked hard at the productions which emerged from the special relationship between Eluard and Ernst. Miró must therefore have been impressed by the picture-poems which Ernst made in 1924.³⁹ Yet both Picabia and Ernst seem to have offered catalysts rather than formal precedents. Picabia's lettering has none of the ambiguity and visual provocativeness of Miró's, since it simply identifies the pictorial field as a mechanical diagram. And Ernst's lettering, made to circulate around and through a de Chiricoesque landscape space, is never asked either to structure that space or to make inroads into the abstract realm of the sign, which was the shared interest of Miró and Klee. Thus, while Miró was certainly not blind to the visual activity around him, his own explorations were grounded in his feelings about the precedence of the pictorial field and the way drawn writing could open onto a new understanding of its structure.

In the 1927 "*Beaucoup de monde*" (cat. no. 29) there is once again an equivalence between writing, conventional sign systems and the pictograph. Fanning outward and into depth from a point at the left side of the field, the space slips from the uncertain foreground of the writing past the sign/horizon line of the arrow, into a pictographic statement of depth. A range of parallel lines at the top of the painting—Miró's sign for clouds—is made to work here as an emblem of space.⁴⁰ Another canvas of 1927 maintains this kind of structure with a vanishing point at the left of the painting. Together with a kind of internally projected picture frame, the linear elements float like signs of pictorial space within the freedom of an open field (fig. 14). And the magnificent work of 1927 known as *The Torcador* (cat. no. 51) recapitulates the sign system of the *Head of a Catalan Peasant*, but now incorporates, in the floating rectangle of black, a shape which reflects that of the picture field itself onto and into the space of the work. The referents of Miró's line are always double in this way—signifying a world beyond the painting and at the same time involved in a game of self-reference—a statement of the exigencies of the picture field.

The limits to which Miró was willing to go, the risks of emptiness and non-signification he was willing to take, are stated as early as 1925 in the extraordinary *Painting* (cat. no. 18) in which a field of blue is differentiated only by a slight coagulation or thickening at its center. There, the finest breath of a horizontal striation registers both as the horizon line within the field and as the central crease in the picture surface. In one stroke, that slash in the blue field

³⁶ See discussion, cat. no. 2.

³⁷ See discussion, cat. no. 1.

³⁸ See *Max Ernst, Peintures pour Paul Eluard*. Editions Denoël, Paris, 1969, p. 51.

³⁹ These are: "*Dans une ville pleine de mystères . . .*" and "*Qui est ce grand malade . . .*"

⁴⁰ Miró made this identification to the authors in conversation.

creates the effect of pictorial space (with its possibilities of illusionistic release), and becomes an ideogram of its construction. It seems fair to say, given this painting, that by 1925 Miró had brought off the most daringly open work of the first quarter of the century; just as he was to delight Eluard five years later with producing its nakedest.⁴¹ It was not until the two great cycles of murals from 1961 and 1962 (cat. nos. 59–44) that Miró was to attempt anything quite like it again.

In a series of twelve landscapes produced in the summer of 1927, Miró explored the potential of a more intensely chromatic use of the ground to carry the pictures' structure. Miró has been quoted as saying of Matisse that he "taught us all that autonomous color, with or without modeling, could carry structure through contrasts and subtle juxtapositions."⁴² One of these 1927 landscapes depends for its structure on the absolute chromatic parity between red and blue flat fields of color at their maximum intensity (cat. no. 26). In this way the landscape seems to reconstitute the 1925 *Painting* (cat. no. 18) by substituting the radiance of flat color for the atmospheric gentleness of the earlier picture's ground.⁴³ It represents an attitude toward color and structure to which Miró returned thirty years later in *The Lark's Wing Encircled with Golden Blue* . . . (cat. no. 47).

In the landscape called *The Grasshopper* (cat. no. 24), Miró's signature operates on the field somewhat in the way it had in "*Un oiseau poursuit une abeille* . . ." by representing the nature of the landscape's terrain. Further, by presenting the letters of his first name, Joan, in splayed almost invisible writing, Miró forces the reading of the words to overlap the act of looking. For reading becomes synonymous with the search, the exploratory piercing of the flat field, that is necessary to transform the continuous surface of the yellow ground into the illusionistic depth of the pictorial world.

Miró has said, "The Impressionists realized that the landscape breathes, that it changes from one moment to the next—that under the influence of light every form becomes transparent and even shadows are full of life. Nothing has changed, we simply have to see it again, that is to say, to find a new form for it."⁴⁴ From 1925 to 1927, Miró's work can be seen as an unbroken effort to find that form, and then in the 1960s to re-find it.

⁴¹ "One of the two women I have known best—have I known others?—when I first met her, had just fallen in love with a painting by Miró, *The Spanish Dancer*, the barest painting ever conceived. On the virgin canvas, a hatpin and the feather of a wing." Paul Eluard, "Naissance de Miró," *Cahiers d'art*, nos. 1–5, 1957, p. 80.

⁴² James Thrall Soby, *Joan Miró*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1959, p. 28.

⁴³ Clement Greenberg, one of the first to see Miró's performance as a colorist, places the date of its emergence at 1950, when Miró "becomes a great constructor in color as well as a great decorator. In the end his ability to use color structurally—that is, to build the picture on the oppositions and intervals of pure hue as apart from those of dark and light—surpasses Picasso's and perhaps any other painter's of his time except, again, Matisse's." Greenberg, *Joan Miró*, Quadrangle Press, New York, 1948, p. 51. However, from the paintings in the present exhibition, it seems to me that this phenomenon really begins in 1926–27.

⁴⁴ Walter Erben, *Joan Miró*, Lund Humphries, London, 1959, p. 42.

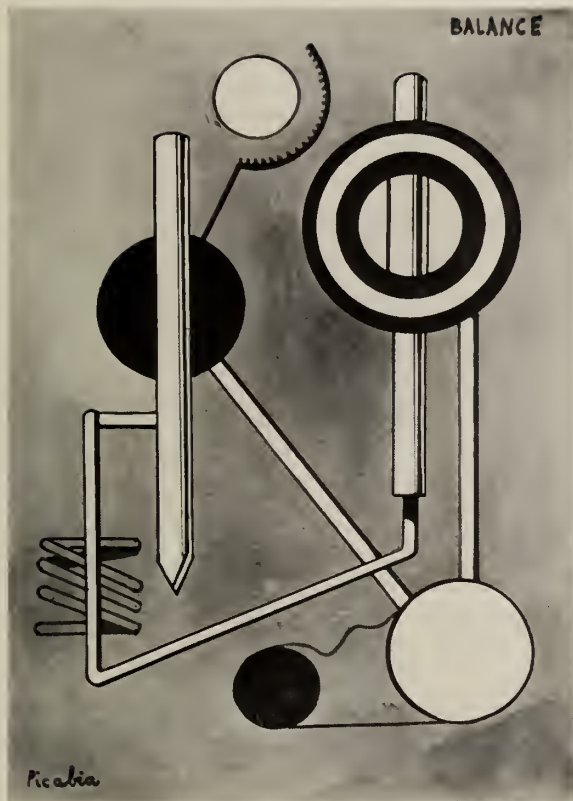


Fig. 13. Francis Picabia. *Balance*. c. 1919. Collection Mrs. Lillian H. Florsheim, Chicago

Fig. 14. Joan Miró. *Painting*. 1927. Collection Mrs. Alfred Greenfield, Philadelphia



For some of the younger artists who saw his painting in the mid and late twenties, Miró's work had indeed the force and immediacy of a totally new form. Giacometti, for example, is quoted as saying, "For me, it was the great liberty—something more aerial, more disengaged, lighter than anything I had ever seen . . . He was so truly a painter that all he needed was to drop three blobs of color on the canvas for it to exist and be coherent as a painting."⁴⁵ But while Giacometti was overwhelmed by Miró's gifts as a "pure" painter, Breton, as the *chef d'école* of Surrealism, was for his part somewhat dismayed. At the end of the twenties Breton wrote of these works:

Of the thousands of problems which preoccupy him to no degree at all, even though they are the ones which trouble the human spirit, there is only one perhaps towards which Miró has any inclination: to abandon himself to painting, and only to painting, (which is to restrict himself to the one domain in which we may be sure he has the means), to give himself over to pure automatism about which, for my part, I have never ceased to make an appeal, but of which I fear that Miró has too summarily come to the proof of its worth and its deep rationale. Perhaps it is true, for that reason that he will pass for the most "surrealist" of us all. But how far we are in his work from that "chemistry of the intellect" of which we had been speaking!"⁴⁶

The intellectual chemistry about which Breton had been speaking, on this occasion, was the work of Masson, which Breton could read in terms of his own ideas of the symbolism of the unconscious. Often taken out of context, the above statement by Breton is made to read as an affirmation of Miró as a Surrealist. Yet, just as Breton wasted no time in 1926 criticizing Miró (along with Ernst) for having collaborated with Diaghilev and the *Ballets russes* in his contribution to the décor for *Roméo et Juliette*,⁴⁷ Breton was unhappy with Miró's painting during the 1920s. But by 1929–30 Miró had begun work which must have been much more congenial to Breton's sensibility. The series of collages which Miró started at that time and developed in the early 1930s had much more in common with Breton's own *tableaux-poèmes*, which incorporated found-objects and written phrases onto the surface of a canvas. As well, they were more in accord with the elaborate collages Ernst was also doing at the time. The far more compact pictorial syntax which increasingly developed out of these collages had much to do with the shaping of Miró's style in the 1930s and in the decades to come. Reaching back to the teeming imagery of *The Harlequin's Carnival*, they formed the image of Miró's art that is the most familiar and by far the most prevalent to the large audience of his work.

But Miró is not particularly awed by his own image. He has always been extremely open to the work of artists less established than himself, and he is legendary in Paris for conscientiously

⁴⁵ Pierre Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁴⁶ André Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Brentano's, New York, 1945, p. 68.

⁴⁷ See cat. no. 20.

going to exhibitions of young painters. Thus in the early 1950s he saw and was moved by work of the American abstract-expressionist generation, particularly the paintings of Jackson Pollock.⁴⁸ With the impetus of these painters behind him, Miró returned to the scale he had achieved in his great *Circus Horse* painting of 1927 (cat. no. 34) and to the structure by means of pure color of his 1925 *Painting* (cat. no. 18). Reconnecting with the sign language of *Head of a Catalan Peasant* and with the symbol systems of the great works of 1927, he began work on the huge mural cycles which have preoccupied much of his thought during the past decade—and on which he is still at work.

The three blue murals of 1961 came first (cat. nos. 39–41). Then in 1962 a three-panelled mural in yellow-orange, green and red (cat. nos. 42–44). This was followed by a huge triptych in white (which Miró calls *Paintings for the Cell of a Solitary Man*); and at present he is working on a tripartite mural on a black ground.

The red panel of the multi-colored mural (cat. no. 44) forms a particularly interesting reprise of the 1927 *Landscape* called *Rabbit and Flower* (cat. no. 26). In the earlier painting Miró had held the surface continuous by means of two devices: the equivalence in intensity between its red and blue halves; and the use of white silhouettes for its sparse figuration. The “rabbit,” due to the simplicity of its shape and because of its color (white), reads as a hole or puncture in the red field. It therefore seems to open a space backward into the fabric of the ground, in contrast to the schematically modeled egg-shape of the “flower.” The latter, due to its greater plasticity, appears to come forward. These two elements oppose whatever perceptual tendency blue has to recede and red to advance. In this way these shapes lock the large, simple planes of the painting into an absolute visual equivalence. In most of the other landscapes of this period, white figures are used for a similar formal task. (See for example, *Landscape* called *The Hare*, cat. no. 27, and *Circus Horse*, cat. no. 34).

In the red panel of 1962, Miró omits the contrast of red and blue, and the white lacunae of the “rabbit” and “flower.” He retains only the horizon line and the flower’s stem—both given in long, unbroken calligraphs. Yet these two lines function in a way that is close to the operation of the early painting. The line of the “stem” both appears behind the ground line and seems to be arching over it. The ambiguity of its placement seems to prise apart the absolute continuity of the red surface; and to rehearse, within the completely abstract space of this panel, that primitive beginning of figure-ground separation that one saw in *Head of a Catalan Peasant*. The act of line triumphing over surface, without interrupting the effulgence of the color, is played out with strict economy in all three of the panels for the 1962 mural.

Elsewhere in the work of the sixties, Miró retains the device of the white shape. But instead of using it as a cut or rupture in the surface, he treats it as a kind of halation around the line that invades that surface. This is the case in *Passage of the Migratory Bird*, 1968 (fig. 21) and

⁴⁸ Miró claims to have first been impressed by American painting during his stay in New York in 1947. In 1952 he saw the exhibition of Jackson Pollock’s work in Paris at the Studio Paul Facchetti. See Margit Rowell, *Miró*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1971, p. 30, fns. 56 and 58.

Hair Pursued by Two Planets, 1968 (cat. no. 52), where in one work a scumbled ground of blue and in the other of green create nearly impenetrable fields of color. Onto these grounds Miró registers an arbitrary set of marks—a black line in *Passage of the Migratory Bird*; and in *Hair Pursued by Two Planets*, three linear splashes of orange reaching towards two dots and a crooked line halated by yellow-orange. The areas of lightness which open out behind these marks simultaneously underscore visually and seem to signify the meaning of the pictorial field itself: the tenuous grasp it has on its own opacity. For how solid can a surface be when any mark which appears upon it will drive it backward into subservience as the background to the mark's "figure"?

The magic of Miró's light halos is that they dissipate the power of the mark even while they refer to it. For the field acknowledges its own identity and then transcends it through the medium of color.

For the most part the field paintings of the 1960s refrain from using line as actual writing. But the calligraphic quality of Miró's line and the formal meanings he demanded that that line carry are retained. In a single gesture it lays down the artist's response to things in the natural world and to the act of inscribing the canvas. Functioning as the unsilvered mirror, the color field is held up to the viewer as the medium which connects the presence of a world beyond the painting with this consciousness of the artist who marks its surface.

If there is a magic in Miró's use of signs in the work of the 1920s and the 1960s—in the group of paintings collected here as "magnetic fields"—it is powerfully a formal magic. Miró himself suggests this when he says, "Poetry, *plastically expressed*, speaks its own language."⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Peter Watson, "Joan Miró," *Horizon*, August 1941, p. 151. Author's italics.

Margit Rowell

"Je ne fais aucune différence entre peinture et poésie."

JOAN MIRÓ

Many paintings executed by Joan Miró between 1924 and 1927 are broad and loosely brushed fields of color animated by enigmatic signs. Because of their radical departure from the artist's earlier work, and because of his affiliations at that time, these paintings are generally identified with Miró's "official" Surrealist period and defined as *peinture-poésie*.¹ One of the more convincing analyses of these paintings relates them to the Surrealist practice of automatism. Furthermore according to Miró himself, hallucinations and dreams supplied some of the fundamental imagery which he subsequently elaborated into coherent pictorial form.

Despite their anomalous quality—or perhaps because of it—these paintings by Miró are among the most important works of his career. They are the seed from which his total oeuvre of the next four decades was to flower. *The Tilled Field* (cat. no. 1)—begun in the summer of 1923 in Montroig and finished in Paris during the winter of 1923–24—is generally regarded as the transitional work: the first painting in Miró's new poetic style. Yet the iconography of *The Tilled Field* has never been clear, no more so than the reasons for this departure from an earlier style. If one compares this painting to *The Farm*, painted two years earlier and ostensibly from the same source of inspiration (Miró's family farm in Montroig), many questions remain unanswered. Although the familiar barnyard animals are depicted in both, in the later painting they are endowed with a supernatural quality. The goat feeding on a cactus in the upper left is scarcely recognizable. The lizard in the lower right—an infinitesimal detail in *The Farm*—has been transformed into a mythical creature whose importance is central to the whole composition; it is as though he has cast an enchanted spell.

Miró's visual sources up to that period are well known.² Yet they throw limited light on the metamorphosis from the mundane to the magical which quite suddenly takes place. This is reason enough to explore another important facet of Miró's activity: namely, the poetry he was reading and the poets he was seeing. The artist's biographers are careful to mention that his friends in Paris in the twenties were as much poets as painters. Miró has repeatedly confirmed this himself. And his friendship with the painter André Masson was meaningful to him on more than purely artistic grounds.³

¹ *Peinture-poésie*: poetic painting; "a commitment to subjects of a visionary, poetic, and hence metaphoric order" as distinguished from "*peinture-pure*, or *peinture-peinture* [by which advanced abstraction was sometimes known in France]." William Rubin, *Dada and Surrealist Art*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1969, p. 150.

² The repertory includes Catalan Romanesque frescoes and illuminations, Majorcan toys, the familiar landscape at Montroig and the Barcelona Art Nouveau architect Gaudí. More specific pictorial references include his teacher in Barcelona: Modesto Urgell, Cubism (through exhibitions in Barcelona), van Gogh, Henri Rousseau, Matisse, Picabia, and by 1924, Paul Klee.

³ It is generally accepted that Masson introduced Miró to the practice of automatism and to the work of Paul Klee.

Masson was always a great reader and full of ideas. Among his friends were practically all the young poets of the day. Through Masson I met them. Through them I heard poetry discussed. The poets Masson introduced me to interested me more than the painters I had met in Paris. I was carried away by the new ideas they brought and especially the poetry they discussed. I gorged myself on it all night long—poetry principally in the tradition of Jarry's Surmâle.⁴

André Masson has recently described certain bases of their friendship in the following terms:

It was obvious that for Miró as for myself, poetry (in the broadest sense of the term) was of capital importance. Our ambition was to be a painter-poet and in that we differed from our immediate predecessors who, while going around with the poets of their generation, were terrified of being labelled "literary painters." As painters purporting to work from poetic necessity, we were taking a great risk. Furthermore, but for a few rare exceptions, the verdict of the French critics observing our beginnings was: "Definition of a Surrealist painter: not a painter but a failed poet." This was in the best of cases. Often we were charitably advised to "go and have your heads examined" . . . As for written poetry, although Joan divulged little about his interests here as elsewhere, I can say that he loved the same symbolist poets as the rest of us: Jarry, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Mallarmé . . . He never offered details about the inspirational origins of his paintings. This was distasteful to him, which makes the job of real criticism all the more difficult.⁵

Although much of Miró's public endorses his myth as the child-like, spontaneous and non-literary painter *par excellence*, there is documentation which contradicts this image. Prior to his arrival in Paris in 1919–1920, Miró had come in contact with the Dada movement in Barcelona, through French and Spanish periodicals and somewhat later through Picabia. The list of avant-garde magazines which were founded in the teens and available to Miró in Barcelona is impressive, from the French publications *Les Soirées de Paris*, *SIC*, *Nord-Sud*, *Littérature*, 291 and 391⁶ to the Catalan magazines *Trossos*, *La Revista*, *Vell i nou* and the Franco-Catalan bi-monthly *L'Aviat* or *L'Instant*, for which Miró did a poster in 1919. It is interesting to note the current of ideas passing between Paris and Barcelona at that time. The Spanish poets Pérez-Jorba, Huidobro, J. V. Foix, J. M. Junoy were writing Spanish *calligrammes* shortly after Apollinaire's first appeared in *Les Soirées de Paris* in 1914; these poets were publishing in the Paris-based review *SIC* as early as 1918. Significantly, Miró's acquaintance with Dada was primarily literary.

⁴ James Johnson Sweeney, "Joan Miró: Comment and Interview," *Partisan Review*, vol. XV, no. 2, February 1948, p. 209. It is interesting to note Miró's crediting Masson with his introduction to poetry, when, according to Masson (in conversation with the authors in June 1972), Miró was already immersed in poetry before the two even met.

⁵ Letter dated April 19, 1972, from André Masson to the authors.

⁶ 391 was in fact first published by Picabia in Barcelona (through the Galerie Dalmau) in 1917, although it was later to be published in Paris.

Furthermore, the artist's long-time friend James Johnson Sweeney, who accompanied him to Surrealist *réunions* in the twenties, confirms Miró's interest in poetry and poetics by an eye-witness account:

*Miró sat through these meetings as though hypnotized. He was genuinely fascinated by the discussions of poetic techniques and practices which were devised to suspend the powers of reason. The objective of course was to liberate form and meaning in the interests of "pure poetry."*⁷

These and other accounts by Miró's friends, biographers and Miró himself provide evidence that Miró's interest in literature and particularly in poetry was more than peripheral. The task at hand is to discover how poetry could have influenced his work if in fact it did. Whether Miró's inspiration sprang from his subconscious or his conscious mind appears to be of secondary importance here. Primary to the understanding of Miró's oeuvre is the fact that during the early to mid twenties, his imagination was nourished by poetry.^{7a} The years 1925 to 1924 mark the turning point: from an artist who was seeking his personal style, he became an artist who had found it. The shock which produced the transition from one to the other was poetry.

At least one painting from this period shows explicit inspiration from a literary source: *Portrait of Madame B.* of 1924 (cat. no. 4). The reference is Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu Roi*. Miró has himself confirmed that Jarry, whom he discovered at that time, was one of his preferred authors. But more important, the artist's images and references to the text are literal and identifiable.

One of the singularities of *Ubu Roi* is that it was illustrated—although sparsely—by Jarry himself. His illustrations depict the hero "Père Ubu" as a short barrel-shaped character whose distinguishing features are a dunce-cap and an enormous spiral (known as "La Gidouille") inscribed upon his stomach, suggestive of his predominantly intestinal functions (see fig. 15).

In Miró's *Portrait of Madame B.*, the general silhouette of the figure on the left is too particularized to refer to anyone but Père Ubu. Moreover critics writing when *Ubu Roi* was first produced⁸ refer to Père Ubu's pig-like snout.⁹ Once this figure's identity is established, the rest of the iconography is easily legible, derived directly from passages in the text. The central figure is "Mère Ubu," holding the scepter and crown of the king of Poland. (Mère Ubu to Père

7 In conversation with the authors, April 1972.

7a Poetry has been a lifetime preoccupation for Miró. However it seems to the author that the identity of literary and pictorial images occurs particularly during this period.

8 Presented as a play for marionettes in 1888, *Ubu Roi* was first produced on the stage at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre (M. Lugné-Poe) in December 1896.

9 At Jarry's suggestion, the principal character wore a mask in the theatrical production.



Fig. 16. *Ubu Roi* marionette, two views. Reproduced in *Les Soirées de Paris*, May 15, 1914, p. 292.



Fig. 15. Alfred Jarry. "Véritable portrait de monsieur Ubu." Frontispiece for *Ubu Roi*, Fasquelle Editeurs, Paris, 1959.

Ubu: "Yes, and as soon as he is dead, you will take his scepter and his crown.")¹⁰ The image in the upper right is a parody of the Polish coat of arms—an heraldic eagle with outspread wings—which the legitimate queen of Poland sees in a dream (the Queen to the King: "...didn't I see him in a dream smiting you with his troops and throwing you in the Vistula, and an eagle like that on the arms of Poland setting the crown on his head?")¹¹ On the far left, the green serpentine form is Père Ubu's green candle, by which he swears throughout the play (Père Ubu: "By my green candle...")¹² One of Jarry's drollest inventions in this play is the "machine à décerveler" or "debraining machine" to which Ubu submits his nobles and ministers. The dark wisps emerging from the head of Miró's Mère Ubu and from that of his eagle are obvious indications of "debraining."

Finally, the letters: IMRA, affixed to the crown held by Mère Ubu, stimulate a number of possible readings. The most prominent and first that comes to mind is Miró's name or signature. However, once the letters are unscrambled, they spell MIRA.¹³ A second reading is the French abbreviation for English royalty: SMRA (Sa Majesté la Reine d'Angleterre)¹⁴ Thus Miró has devised an equivocal contraction suggesting two if not more possibilities, but imposing no "correct" reading. This is the first picture in which the artist uses the poetic device of scrambled letters in order to expand possibilities of interpretation. It is not the last, as we shall subsequently observe.

Portrait of Madame B. is an unusually literal image; compared to most of Miró's paintings of that period, its iconography is exceptionally clear. In *L'Addition* of 1925 (cat. no. 16), which offers another example of Jarry-inspired imagery, the references to the text are less direct. But by this very indirection, *L'Addition* offers a more characteristic example of the kind of correspondence one can find between Miró's paintings and his reading.

Like *Portrait of Madame B.*, *L'Addition*¹⁵ is a complex image derived from disparate visual and poetic sources. In *Portrait of Madame B.*, one can analyze the sources as follows: a visual image (Jarry's drawings for *Ubu Roi*), verbal images (explicit passages in the text), and a poetic device (the scrambled letters and meanings of IMRA). In *L'Addition* the sources are similarly both visual and verbal, but the artist's reference to them is more diffuse.

¹⁰ "Oui, et dès qu'il sera mort tu prendras son scèptre et sa couronne." Alfred Jarry, *Ubu Roi*, Fasquelle Editeurs, Paris, 1959, pp. 50–51.

¹¹ "...ne l'ai-je pas vu en songe vous frappant de sa masse d'armes et vous jetant dans la Vistule, et un aigle comme celui qui figure dans les armes de Pologne lui plaçant la couronne sur la tête?" *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹² "De par ma chandelle verte, ..." *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹³ "Miró" and "mira" are two tenses of the same verb in Spanish: "mirar": to look at. "Mira" is the third person singular present tense or the imperative; "miró" is the third person singular perfect tense. So that another interpretation is "Mira!" or "Look!"

¹⁴ Another obvious reading, but one which I think can be dismissed in this context, is INRI (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews).

¹⁵ The title is misleading both in French and English (English translation: *The Check*). As is the case of most of the paintings in this period, Miró's title was simply *Peinture* or *Painting*.

In the May 15, 1914 issue of *Les Soirées de Paris*,¹⁶ Apollinaire published a photograph of "Two views of the original marionette for *Ubu Roi*." The marionette is shown twice in profile and, although the photograph is poor, one can describe the back contour of the head as resembling a dried bean, whereas the front profile is distinguished by a receding forehead, a large protruding nose and no chin. This essentially grotesque head is mounted on a stick which disappears into a formless garment or cloak. The figure is completed by arms, hands, ankles and feet, the whole strung up as befits a marionette. (See fig. 16)

Between Jarry's bean-shaped head—which is attached as though skewered to the marionette's neck—and the heads drawn in profile in Miró's *L'Addition*, the resemblance seems too close to be a case of mere coincidence.¹⁷ Furthermore, other sources for this droll, bean-shaped profile would be difficult to find. Even the Catalan toys which are well-known sources of some of Miró's forms do not present these specific characteristics. Accepting Jarry's marionettes as one source of Miró's imagery in 1925, one might speculate that the prevailing weightlessness of Miró's figures of this period, as well as the "stringing together" of otherwise isolated motifs, owes something to the idea of the marionette.

Once again, when we have discovered what seems to be an important visual clue to the painting, literary allusions to Jarry are easier to recognize. Miró has referred repeatedly to the enormous impression Jarry's *Le Surmâle* had upon him and it is this text that has inspired the imagery of the painting. As the story opens, the hero Marcueil—the *surmâle* or "super-male"—asserts that a man can make love an infinite number of times. Challenged on this claim, he proceeds later in the story to do so eighty-two consecutive times. In order to perform this feat, he disguises himself as an Indian, not wanting to reveal his identity to those who have been summoned to witness the event.

L'Addition may be seen as an illustration of the text recalled from memory. One remembers that Marcueil painted and powdered his body to resemble an Indian, a disguise which may even have included a feather headdress. Of course, he was endowed with a superhuman phallus. Ellen, his partner, was white-skinned. She wore a mask until the end of the performance, when the mask fell away showing eyes circled with exhaustion. At a certain point in the narration, the lovers ate and drank together and she kissed his body all over, leaving multicolored imprints. At another point, she arose to put balm on herself; and at the conclusion of the experience, her body appeared as on the verge of decomposition.¹⁸ Ellen's intimate state is illustrated by the artist by the dotted line of a dilated vagina as opposed to its original firm red state. The return to formlessness is suggested by the line of the white figure's body meandering to the upper right corner

¹⁶ Page 292.

¹⁷ Two other paintings of 1925 show the same bean-shaped head in profile: *Painting*, 1925 (D. 151) and *Painting*, 1925 (not in Dupin, reproduced in Jacques Lassaigue, *Miró*, Skira, 1965, p. 44).

¹⁸ "Le Surmâle ne verrait plus Ellen, dont la forme allait retourner, par les contractures musculaires qui précèdent la décomposition, à ce qui fut avant toute forme." "The *Surmâle* would never see Ellen again; through the muscular contractions which precede decomposition, her form was to return to that which exists before all form." Alfred Jarry, *Oeuvres complètes*, Editions du Grand-Chêne, Lausanne, n.d., vol. III, p. 215.

of the canvas. The column of numbers next to it refers to the counting of Marcueil's performances, and the circular motif in the mid left-hand area is the peep-hole through which the scientist Dr. Bathybius is observing the experiment, complete with the dotted vectors of his seeing eye.

Some of the motifs depicted in the painting are not, in fact, in the text, but are extrapolated in Miró's imagination.¹⁹ It is obviously not the particular images of the story so much as his recollections of it which Miró has freely interpreted here.

The two examples from Jarry present evidence that Miró's imagination was stimulated by specific literary works.²⁰ Although they are exemplary, they are not unique in Miró's production between 1924 and 1927. Poetic images and techniques adapted from literary sources occur with enough frequency to justify considering them extremely important to the understanding of the artist's private iconography in this period.

There appear to be essentially four ways in which Miró's painting of 1924 to 1927 was affected by poetry. The first—and perhaps most common—was that he absorbed and mentally elaborated poetic images which he subsequently projected in visual form; the two paintings we have looked at contain examples of this. A second type of influence from poetry is instanced in Miró's *tableaux-poèmes*,²¹ where Miró adapted an equally vivid verbal image in word form on the canvas, free from actual literary reference, but nonetheless evoking in the viewer's mind a similar range of imaginary and non-depicted connotations as the poetry he was reading. Still another aspect of Miró's involvement with poetry lies in his adaptation of poetic devices in the elaboration of a *tableau-poème*: devices such as the scrambling of letters, alliteration, syntactic inversion, homonyms. His broadest debt to poetry is in the general metaphysical meaning and poetic conventions prevalent among the forerunners of Surrealism as well as among his contemporaries.

An early example of the first type—where a pictorial image contains references to specific poetic imagery—is found in "*Sourire de ma blonde*" (cat. no. 5) of 1924. The title alludes to the popular French song "*Auprès de ma blonde, qu'il fait bon dormir.*" Miró executed several

19 Marcueil's coloring is unmistakably a copper-red and there is no mention of a feather headdress. Although Ellen does arise to put balm on herself, there is no reference to her intimate state, although one imagines what it might be. And although after eating pastries, she does kiss her lover all over his body, she does not leave colored marks but spots of sugar.

20 Another painting of 1925 which probably draws its inspiration from Jarry is *Painting (The Candle)* (D. 130) in which can be seen a crown suspended on a string, and a candle (Ubu's marionette's crown and his green candle).

21 *Tableau-poème*: picture-poem, where words are inserted in the field of the canvas. In a discussion of Max Ernst's *tableaux-poèmes* of 1924, William Rubin has commented that "the words are syntactically related and, like the images they replace, are primary rather than secondary in determining the design of the picture." William Rubin, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

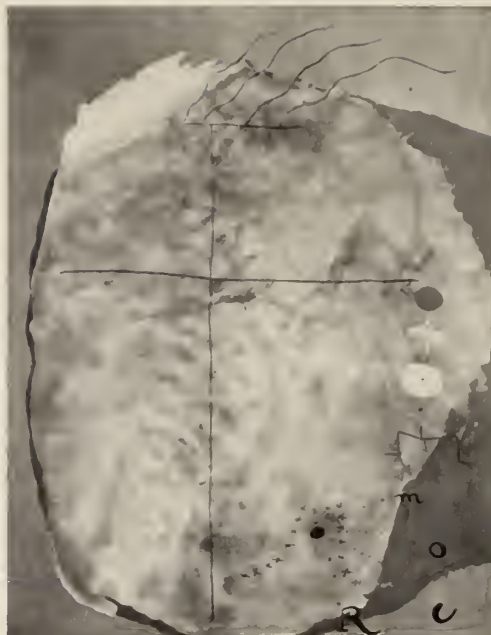


Fig. 17. Joan Miró, "Amour." 1926. Collection Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne

drawings and paintings during this period in which he made indirect references to this theme.²²

"*Sourire de ma blonde*" is organized as an heraldic image, with a studied symmetry and frontality which are rare, not to say unique, in Miró's oeuvre.²³ However, despite the clarity of its presentation, the reading of the image is highly ambiguous.

One possible reading identifies the central image as a pictogram of the blond loved-one's body, in which the V-shaped torso has obvious sexual connotations. Starting from there, one can read the brown scumbled area as a mass of pubic hair, the flower as a reference to the fragrance of flowers, the grapes as an allusion to romantic intoxication, and the fly as a Rim-baldian symbol to which we will return later. The artist's image of ideal womanhood is thus schematically rendered as female genitalia, grounded in the earth (through the outsized arms and legs) and sprouting long tendrils of hair. Isolated motifs and symbols associated with erotic love radiate around the central figure: an ear, a shooting star leaving a trail of sparks, teeth, an eye, an idealized profile, hair, a throbbing or flaming vagina, breasts.

The loosely symmetrically disposition of the "spokes" of the woman's hair implies another meaning: woman as the matrix of the world, or the hub of the universe, as in the sun. This in no way obviates another reading, more peculiar to Miró's private iconography, according to which the central brown motif of the woman-sun is also a potato, radiating tentacle-like sprouts.²⁴

²² Other examples of paintings inspired by this song are "*Le corps de ma brune*" (cat. no. 15) and "*Bonheur d'aimer ma brune*" 1925 (D. 126 a; not reproduced).

²³ Roland Penrose's two paintings, *Maternity*, 1924 and *Head of a Catalan Peasant*, 1925, contain an emblematic symmetry which is less literally heraldic, and more dependent on necessities of pictorial coherence.

²⁴ André Masson, in the letter cited above (fn. 5), recalls an episode which took place in Miró's studio at 45, rue Blomet: Eluard, exclaiming over what he took to be a sun-motif in a painting of about 1924, was informed by Miró that it was not a sun, but a potato. This singular interpretation could apply to both *The Hunter*, 1923-24, (cat. no. 2) and *The Harlequin's Carnival*, 1924-25. An example of the woman-matrix-potato motif is found in the painting *The Potato* of 1928 (D. 257) which is the portrait of a monumental earth-mother figure.

The idea of the heraldic emblem or *blason* of womanhood is common in Surrealist literature, particularly in Surrealist poetry. The most celebrated precedent is Arthur Rimbaud's sonnet: "Voyelles" of 1871. In a highly esoteric presentation, the poet evokes the different sexual attributes of the female body, associating each to a color and a vowel: the genitals correspond to *A* and black; the breasts to *E* and white; the lips to *I* and red; the hair to *U* and green (associated with the waves of the sea); the eyes correspond to *O* and blue. Each sexual attribute is implied (without being named) by a series of recondite metaphors.

One can recognize all the attributes in Rimbaud's literary emblem in Miró's painting, translated into the artist's personal idiom, of course. However, the closest correspondence between Miró's imagery and that of Rimbaud is found in relation to the poet's first stanza, devoted to the letter *A*:

*A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles,
Golfes d'ombre; . . .*²⁵

*A, black corset hairy with the glittering flies
That buzz around cruel stench,
Gulfs of darkness; . . .*

From the V-shaped torso (an overturned A?)²⁶ inscribed by a black line, to the imaging of a fly and what can be read as a "gulf of darkness," there is reason to conjecture that Miró may have been drawing inspiration from Rimbaud. We know that Miró had read Rimbaud by that time.²⁷ "Voyelles," as one of the Surrealists' preferred poems, was certainly one of the earliest of the poet's works which Miró would have read.

In a painting of two years later—"Amour" of 1926 (fig. 17)—one finds what appears to be further evidence for Miró's attachment to this sonnet. In "*Sourire de ma blonde*," the reference to the poem is broad. Although the relationship is conjectural, it is entirely in keeping with the Surrealists' propensity for the codification of esoteric sign-to-meaning relationships, and visual punning. In "*Amour*," on the contrary, the initial of the title word is constituted by an image of buzzing flies around a black spot; a depiction which is identifiable as a sexual orifice.

Whether or not Rimbaud's poem was the precise source of inspiration for Miró's "*Sourire de ma blonde*," the painting is definitely an heraldic emblem of womanhood. Another literary example of a *blason* of an ideal woman is found in a poem of 1912 by Blaise Cendrars:

²⁵ Wallace Fowlie (translation, introduction, and notes by), *Rimbaud, Complete Works, Selected Letters*, The University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 120.

²⁶ See R[ené] F[aurisson], "A-t-on lu Rimbaud?," *Bizarre*, nos. 21-22, 1961, pp. 5-6.

²⁷ All of Miró's biographers stress Miró's interest in Rimbaud which dates from this period. Furthermore in a recent conversation with the authors (January 1972), Miró emphasized Rimbaud's importance.

Une femme se dressait, nue, éblouissante, vêtue de ses seuls cheveux. Son rayonnement ne venait pas de sa beauté formelle. Il était intérieur, comme si, à travers son corps charnel, un autre corps eut lui, avec intermittences, dans un entrebâillement, idéal! Le Nu intérieur.

Elle ne souriait pas; elle ne méditait pas. Ses yeux étaient voilés par ses cheveux. Elle rayonnait. Elle se dressait, immense comme le noyau du monde, la Matrice.

Tout autour d'elle, les nuages s'amoncclaient, lourds, menaçants, plombés, ébranlés de sourdes secousses, tout chargés de vertige.

Soudain, un orage épouvantable se déclina. L'encombrement des nues s'effondra avec le rugissement répété de millions de tonnerres. Et les éclairs gelaient. Ils gelaient vers la Femme.

Les éclairs étaient des mains. Et la Femme m'apparut comme au milieu des airs, dans un cercle de mains. Toutes ces mains l'entouraient. Toutes ces mains se tendaient vers elle. Il y avait les mains maigres de l'artiste, les mains moites du banquier; celles, crochues, de l'avare et celles, gourdes, du vieillard; il y avait les mains timides du jeune homme, les mains adoratives du prêtre et les mains sacrilèges de l'assassin. Les mains de tous les hommes les mains de toutes les générations se tendaient éperdues vers la Femme, la Prostituée. Il y avait aussi les mains hallucinées du Christ.

Elle se taisait. Elle était un moyeu; tous les rais convergeaient vers elle depuis la jante des mondes. La roue tournait emportée dans la nuit, sursautait, battait des étincelles d'univers en univers comme sur des parés; les rayons se tordaient comme des éclairs et la Femme restait là, impassible, au milieu de cette orbe pâle d'électrium, au milieu de cette trombe de désirs déferlés dans l'au-delà.

Alors je reconnus que cette femme c'était Toi, ceinte de la folie désespérée des êtres. Toi, ô Bien-Aimée, que je cloue, implacable, à l'arbre contorsionné de mon désir.

²⁸ Published in *Les Soirées de Paris*, June 15, 1914, pp. 5+5-46. A later Surrealist example of a literary blason is André Breton's poem "L'Union libre" of 1951.

The Wheel

A woman rose up, naked, dazzling, dressed in nothing but her hair. Her radiance proceeded not from the beauty of her form, but from within. It was internal, as if, through flesh itself, another body shone forth, intermittently, through a gap: ideal! The internal Nude.

She was not smiling; not even thinking. Her eyes were veiled by her hair. She shed light. She rose up, immense as the womb of the world, the Matrix.

Around her, clouds gathered, leaden, threatening, shaken occasionally by dull shocks, dizzying collisions.

Suddenly a terrible storm exploded. The clouds dissolved in the echoing roar of thousands of thunderbolts. And lightning flashes spurted—spurted toward the Woman.

These flashes were hands. And the Woman seemed to be in mid-air, in a circle of hands. All these hands surrounded her, stretched toward her! The bony hands of the artist, the moist hands of the banker, the clutching hands of the miser, and the swollen hands of the dying; the timid hands of the adolescent, the adoring hands of the priest, and the murderer's sacrilegious hands. The hands of all men, of all the generations of men, stretched desperately toward the Woman, the Whore. The hands, too, the stricken hands of Christ.

She said nothing. She was at the hub; all rays converged upon her from the rim of the world. The wheel turned, swept on through the night, striking sparks from universe to universe, as though from cobblestones; the rays of light writhed like lightning flashes, and the Woman hung there, impassive, within that pale orb of amber, at the center of that whirlwind of desires stretching to infinity.

Then I realized that this woman was You, girdled with the despairing madness of all men. You, O Beloved, whom I nail, implacable, to the twisted tree of my desire.

(translation by Richard Howard)

Although it would be difficult to prove what Miró was reading specifically, such imagery was certainly present in his mind.

The success of Miró's painting "*Sourire de ma blonde*" lies in its extreme equivocation, which applies even to the exact "reading" of the title. If the above interpretation of the image is correct—that is, that it constitutes a symbolic (and sexually overpowering) schema of womanhood—then the title is an ironic euphemism. "The smile of my blond" is to be read as "the inviting genitals of my blond loved one," a "smile" connoting openness and hospitality as does the open "I" configuration of the central image.

The relationship of the title to the iconography is not the last enigma inherent in the painting. The title itself, on the basis of its visual aberrations, raises many unanswered questions. The concerted breaking of "*sou-rire*," by means of two distinct styles of lettering, creates a pun: "*Sous-rire*" or "under-laugh," a pun which in its erotic connotations runs parallel to the iconography. The emphasis on the central portion of the title sets it off from the rest, encouraging one to read "*EMABL*" which is phonetically "aimable." This is in keeping with the homonymic practices particularly favored by both Marcel Duchamp and the Surrealist poet Robert Desnos. On the basis of these graphic indications, if we break down the title and read it phonetically, we arrive at "*Sous-rire d'aimable onde*" ("smile of a pleasant wave"). Although "*onde*" or "wave" can be translated in reference to various symbolic contexts, for the Symbolist and Surrealist poets, it is generally feminine and erotic in its allusions, through the association with (waves of) hair or with the sea (*la mer : la mère*). All these symbolic referents were in fact compacted by Rimbaud in the stanza devoted to *U* in "*Voyelles*."

Common Surrealist symbolism and conventions provide the broadest general frame of reference to which we may relate Miró's pictorial inspiration during this period. It is within these parameters that we have analyzed "*Sourire de ma blonde*." However there are instances where the artist's imagery corresponds so closely to the poetic images in a specific poem as to give the impression that the painter was unconsciously *illustrating* that poem. In this context, a comparison of Miró's painting of 1925: "*Le corps de ma brune*" (cat. no. 15) to a poem by Saint-Pol-Roux: "*Les Deux serpents qui burent trop de lait*" is enlightening.

29 Saint-Pol-Roux, *Les Reposeurs de la procession*, Mercure de France, Paris, 1895, pp. 215–219. The poem is conceived as a dialogue between two lovers.

*Les Deux serpents qui burent trop de lait*²⁹

O tardive, dis-moi, quelles sont ces deux blancheurs qui dans l'ombre s'avancent ?

Sans doute deux rayons de lune exprimés par l'huis de ma venue.

Un rayon de lune est fluide et diaphane, ce que je vois est opaque et solide.

Alors ce sont deux banderoles de neige pleurées par les blessures de la tuile.

Nous sommes en juillet, brune amante, mais fussions-nous en décembre, l'haleine de la chambre aurait déjà fondu les flocons que tu dis.

Alors ce sont deux rameaux d'aubépine aux lèvres des persiennes.

Notre mansarde est haute, et je ne sache pas que l'aubépine pousse dans l'espace.

Alors ce sont deux cols de cygne.

Nous n'avons pas de cygnes dans la chambre, et puis un col de cygne est souple et d'harmonie, tandis qu'à la manière des serpents ces choses-là se tordent.

Et si c'étaient deux ce que tu viens de dire ?

Deux serpents, veux-tu rire, blancs ?

On a vu des serpents boire infiniment de lait.

Personne avec toi n'est entré ?

Personne que ma chevelure.

Comment se seraient-ils introduits en ce cas ?

Aurais-tu peur de deux serpents qui burent trop de lait ?

Prends garde, Marcelle ! ils vont sauter sur toi ! viens. oh viens près du lit ! . . .

Laisse donc ces foetus du sommeil !

Ils ont sauté, sauté jusqu'à ta gorge, ô ma pauvre ! et leurs queues nouées à tes épaules, voilà qu'ils se balancent dans tes gestes vers tes mains . . .

Fou, puisse ma caresse effacer ton cauchemar !

Ils assaillent mon lit, rampent vers mon cou . . . ah je les sens s'y joindre en collier de potence !

Non, c'est moi qui t'enlace, bel halluciné . . .

Eh quoi ! . . . ces deux serpents qui burent trop de lait . . .

Seraient mes bras, ami, mes deux bras blancs . . .

Tes bras . . . tes deux bras blancs . . .

The Two Snakes That Drank Too Much Milk

You're late. Now tell me, what are those two white things over there, shifting in the shadows?

Two moonbeams, probably, falling through the door I left open when I came in.

Moonbeams are liquid, diaphanous—what I'm looking at is opaque, solid.

Then two icicles, snow tears shed by a wounded gutter.

It is July, my love, yet were it December the room's breath would already have melted such snowflakes . . .

Then hawthorn branches at the lips of the blinds.

Our attic room is high, and I never heard of hawthorns growing in mid-air.

Then two swan necks.

There are no swans in the room. Besides, a swan's neck forms harmonious curves—these things are squirming like snakes.

Suppose that's what they are?

Two snakes, are you joking? White snakes?

Snakes have been known to drink endless amounts of milk.

No one came in with you?

No one but my hair.

How could they have got here then?

Would you be afraid of two snakes that drank too much milk?

Watch out, Marcelle! They're going to spring! Come here, come over to the bed! . . .

Forget about these embryos of sleep!

They have leaped at your throat, poor darling! Now their tails coil round your shoulders, swaying in your every gesture, spreading toward your hands . . .

Lamatic! Let my caresses dissolve your nightmare!

They're attacking the bed, creeping toward my neck . . . Now I feel them braiding together into a noose!

No, my handsome hallucinator, that's my own embrace you feel.

Then you mean . . . those two snakes that drank too much milk . . .

Are my own arms, my love, my two white arms . . .

Your arms . . . your two white arms . . .

(translation by Richard Howard)

According to the poem, a lover in a darkened room has a nightmare in which two unidentifiable white forms appear before him. These two opaque white presences and their interpretations in the poem correspond to the two white forms in Miró's painting: two moon beams, two tears of snow, two branches of hawthorn, two necks of swans, two snakes having drunk too much milk. At a climax of hallucination, the lover sees the two white forms leap to his loved one's throat³⁰ and loop their tails around her shoulders. This is the passage illustrated in Miró's image. In the final stanzas, the lover imagines the forms tightening around his neck like a noose only to realize, upon awakening, that they are the loved one's arms embracing him.

Although Miró's friends and biographers concur that Miró rarely attended Surrealist "events," he did attend the Surrealists' banquet in honor of Saint-Pol-Roux, held in 1925 in Paris.³¹ This was an exceptional occurrence, and Miró has admitted he knew and admired the older poet's work. Furthermore, in "Les Deux serpents qui burent trop de lait," the loved one is addressed as "ma brune amante," which increases the probability of this poetic source.

Generally speaking, Miró's paintings drew simultaneously on several sources and "*Le corps de ma brune*" is no exception. Superimposed on Miró's painted image is an inscription which, particularly in the phrase "*comme ma chatte habillée en vert salade, comme de la grêle, c'est pareil*," contains allusions to other poetic sources which we will examine now.

In shifting our attention from Miró's imagery and its possible literary sources to the artist's poetic inscriptions, we are led to consider the second manner in which Miró drew inspiration from poetry: starting from a poetic image, Miró invented equally vivid verbal imagery evoking a similar range of connotations. The poetic similes for the loved one (roughly translated: "like my pussy cat³² dressed in salad green,³³ like hail, it's all the same") is usually interpreted as an automatist poem. However, referents for this poetic imagery exist, one of which is found in a work by Guillaume Apollinaire, a poet Miró knew well. The passage occurs in Apollinaire's earliest work, *L'Enchanteur pourrissant*:³⁴

³⁰ The French word *gorge* means "throat" in this context. It also means "breasts" which is meaningful in relation to Miró's iconography.

³¹ Edouard Roditi, "Interview with Joan Miró," *Arts*, vol. 33, no. 1, October 1958, p. 45. Roland Penrose records Miró speaking of Saint-Pol-Roux in the following passage: "'I work better when I'm not working than when I am,' he told me, 'like Saint-Pol-Roux who used to put a notice outside the door, LE POETE TRAVAILLE ('The Poet works') when he intended to sleep.'" Roland Penrose, *Miró*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1970, p. 170.

³² The French word *chatte* has the same literal and figurative meaning as the English "pussy."

³³ In French usage, *vert salade* ("salad green") is a common painters' term comparable to "apple green" or "bottle green" in English.

³⁴ *L'Enchanteur pourrissant* was first published in book form by Henri Kahnweiler in 1909 with illustrations by André Derain. It was pre-published in the March-August 1904 issues of the magazine *Le Festin d'Esope*. It was reprinted in 1921 by the Editions de la NRF. André Breton considered *L'Enchanteur pourrissant* one of Apollinaire's most remarkable achievements (see Guillaume Apollinaire, *L'Enchanteur pourrissant*, Gallimard, Paris, 1972, Introduction, p. 10). According to Anna Balakian, Breton "identified intimately with the image Apollinaire created of the poet, and with the effort to reawaken the magician in the 20th century." (Anna Balakian, *André Breton*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1971, p. 23)

Puis ayant cessé de rire elle bailla en s'étirant comme une chatte perfide³⁵ . . . S'étant dévêtue alors la dame s'admira. Elle était comme le jardin d'avril, où poussent par places les toisons de persil et de fenouil, comme la forêt de juin, chevelue et lyrique, comme le verger d'octobre, plein de fruits mûrs, ronds et appétissants, comme la plaine de janvier, blanche et froide.³⁶

Then, having stopped laughing, she yawned, stretching like an unfaithful pussy . . . Having undressed, she admired herself. She was like an April garden, where here and there grow clumps of parsley and fennel, like a forest in June, luxuriant and lyrical, like an October orchard, bursting with ripe, round and appetizing fruit, like a plain in January, white and cold.

The likening of the lady to a pussy cat, closely followed by her comparison to an April garden, where here and there grow clumps of parsley and fennel (salad greens)³⁷ and to a plain in January, cold and white, seems too close—in both the specificity and the sequence of the images—to be purely coincidental. Further cross-references, parallel images or “rhymes” between Miró’s visual configurations and Apollinaire’s poetic images reinforce the plausibility of a connection between the two: the flowing white forms also evoke “*chevelue et lyrique*,” the full roundness of the two pairs of breasts provokes a response similar to that of “*fruits mûrs, ronds et appétissants*.”

In “*Le corps de ma brune*,” the forms came first, inspired directly or indirectly by Saint-Pol-Roux’s poem. The text was inscribed afterwards, inspired by the Apollinaire passage and a felt necessity to enrich or “illustrate” the painting in both visual and evocative terms.

Clearly, knowledge of any supporting texts, in this case as in the others, in no way modifies the paintings which exist as visually resolved, self-contained wholes. The inscriptions do not explain the imagery; they “illustrate” it, as Miró has said, thereby expanding its evocative power. The beauty and complexity of these paintings lies in the juxtaposition of essentially autonomous systems of signs which, in a curious way, “rhyme.” It is a measure of Miró’s genius to have molded such disparate connotative materials into a visually coherent whole.

Guillaume Apollinaire was one of the Surrealists’ more revered heroes. Apollinaire’s *calligrammes*.³⁸ for which he is justly venerated, are an extreme example of the poet’s disrespect for traditional syntactical form. Through his linguistic manipulation, he generated pristine images of stunning immediacy. Apollinaire’s mischievous bantering humor, his boundless irrational insights and richly evocative language provided infinite sources of inspiration to be drawn on by subsequent generations.

35 Apollinaire, *op. cit.*, p. 225. This first line appeared only in the 1904 pre-publication version of the piece. It was omitted from subsequent versions. However there is reason to believe that the first version was known in Surrealist circles.

36 Apollinaire, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

37 The image of “salad greens,” through the artist’s free association, has been transformed into “salad green.”

38 See Rosalind Krauss, pp. 21–25 above, and figs. 5, 6, 18, this catalogue.

Apollinaire was probably Miró's broadest source of inspiration during this period. As an essentially visual, tactile sensibility, Miró's understanding of Apollinaire's *calligrammes* was not analytical but intuitive. Thus he applied what he understood with complete freedom, and was bound to no theoretical premises.

For Miró, the visual aspect of words—their graphic peculiarities and their arrangement—is as important as their content. Roland Penrose has suggested that this interest in words and writing is a Catalan idiosyncrasy.³⁹ Miró may in fact have derived the idea of introducing words into painting from Picabia (see fig. 19). However, the emphasis on words as autonomous pictorial entities is missing from the latter's work. Picabia's words generally qualify the images, thereby acting as captions. The way they look is secondary to what they say. One can therefore infer that Picabia's goal was an intellectual rather than a visual enrichment of the image.

The key to Miró's painting of this period and the key to his interest in Apollinaire is something alluded to briefly before: an idea of parallel poetry or "rhyme" between a poetic and a pictorial image. In opposition to the literary tradition of the *calligramme*, Miró generally avoided exact replications between pictorial and poetic imagery. Miró's "rhymes" are abstract, based on two images in different mediums which function independently of one another. This is illustrated by "*Le corps de ma brune*." However, the unity of each painting comes from an essential similarity and simultaneity of meaning between the two. Another example of this in its simplest form is the painting "*Oh! un de ces messieurs qui a fait tout ça*" (cat. no. 12); while the verbal image is an exclamation, the visual image evokes exclamation through its cursive, impulsive, eruptive signs. Miró rarely, if ever, juxtaposed incompatible realities as Magritte was to do at a slightly later period.⁴⁰

It is impossible to discuss Miró's involvement with the poets without evoking the name of Robert Desnos, one of Miró's closest and dearest friends. Like his Surrealist colleagues, Desnos was obsessed by language as a visual, phonetic, signifying material to be manipulated with complete freedom. More excessively than any of his contemporaries, he subjected it to boundless, reckless, outrageous experimentation. The goal was not to shock but to perturb logical reasoning; to free words and in so doing, to free the mind from conventional order. In the process, of course, dreams, images, emotions, and subconscious desires were released.

Sometime around 1922, in order to unlock the unknown reaches of the mind, Desnos indulged in daily sessions of hypnosis along with Breton and Soupault and other poets. This period is known as "*l'époque des sommeils*" or the "era of sleeps." Desnos admitted throughout his lifetime that the basis of his poetic imagery came from hypnosis and sleep, or more exactly from hallucinations and dreams. Although this helps to explain the vertiginous fancies of his imagination, it does not define the full range of his genius, in which formal invention and stylistic coherence were very real concerns.

³⁹ See discussion, cat. no. 14.

⁴⁰ More exactly, Magritte juxtaposed words and images which appear at first glance to be widely separate realities (like Lautréamont's legendary coupling of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table). Miró did not seek to shock, and in a recent conversation with the authors, he confirmed that this was so.

car la RAI SON est fon Ant poème comme un écho d'oise
 à balaiter la terre d'un balai
 CORPS LE
 TRAVERSE SON LE
 Ques de la pipe les sous-ventre
 l'univers infimement délégué qui
 fourne aux forgerons les chaînes
 Plent les antérieurs les formelles

Que cet œillet te dise
 la loi des odeurs
 qu'on n'a pas encore
 promulguée et qui viendra
 un jour
 régner sur
 nos cerveaux
 bien +
 précise & subtile
 que
 les
 sons
 qui
 nous dirigent
 Je préfère bon nez
 à
 tous
 les
 organes à mon amie
 Il est le tône de
 la
 future
 SA
 GES
 SE

Fig. 18. Guillaume Apollinaire. *La Guitare*. 1917

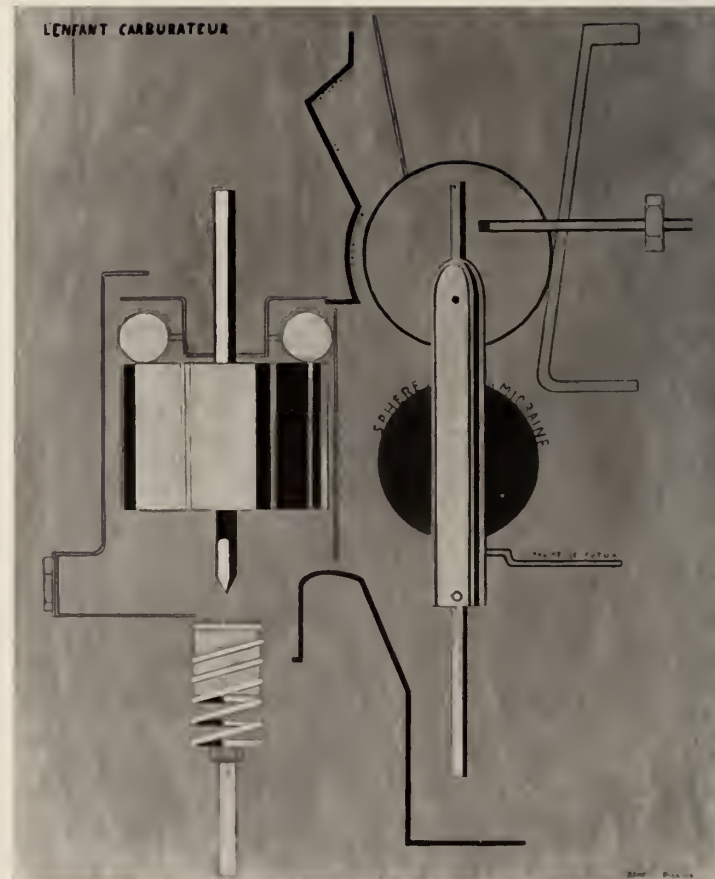


Fig. 19. Francis Picabia. *Child Carburetor*. c. 1919. Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

What distinguishes Desnos' poetry from that of most of the Surrealist poets is an ardent, almost shamelessly romantic lyricism, an authentic emotional intensity, and—in most cases—a fanciful, light-hearted humor. Desnos considered poetry to be an act of love to which the poet abandons himself "*corps et biens*" (body and soul) as in a total embrace. Miró has made a similar statement: "Ce qui compte, c'est de mettre notre âme à nu. Peinture ou poésie se font comme on fait l'amour; un échange de sang, une étreinte totale, sans aucune prudence, sans nulle protection."⁴¹ One can understand the basis on which such strong bonds of friendship were formed between these two men.

Two of Miró's *tableaux-poèmes*: "*Etoiles en des sexes d'escargot*" (cat. no. 11) and "*Un oiseau poursuit une abeille et la baise*" (cat. no. 25) show the specific influence of Desnos.

The highly poetic and equivocal phrase and image "*étoiles en des sexes d'escargot*" (literally: stars in the form of snails' genitals) is arrived at through the application of two linguistic devices found repeatedly in Desnos' poetry. The first, which was shared by other Surrealist poets, is that of alliteration. Desnos exploited alliteration almost to the point of abuse in a collection of poems called *Langage cuit* of 1923. The poem "Elégant cantique de Salomé Salomon" is an excellent example, in which the first stanza reads:

*Mon mal meurt mais mes mains miment
Noeuds, nerfs non anneaux. Nul nord
Même amour mol? mames, mord
Nus néné's nonne ni Nine.*⁴²

Miró's inscription "*étoiles en des sexes d'escargot*" appeals to the reader more through a recurrence of visual units than through the phonetic impact which was crucially important to Desnos. Furthermore, Miró's variant is visually more subtle than it appears at first, in that it is not merely based on a recurrent *e* but on a recurrent unit *es* and its reversed form *se*. The accent aigu of *étoiles* denotes the etymologically earlier existence of an *s* (from the Latin *stella* which generated the Spanish *estrella* and the French Provençal *estcla*). What the eyes read (with the aid of the subconscious mind) is "*e(s)toiles en des sexes d'escargot*." The *to* occurring at the beginning of the phrase and the *ot* at the end are of additional visual importance.

Although the recurrent signs discussed above are visually available and present a "rhyme" to the viewer's retina, any attempt to conjure up a mental image through what appears as a poetic simile is thwarted. Whereas the inscription in "*Le corps de ma brune*" arouses multiple

⁴¹ "The only thing that matters is to lay bare one's soul; making poetry or painting is like making love. What happens is an exchange of blood, a total embrace—reckless and defenseless!" Georges Duthuit, "Où allez-vous Miró?," *Cahiers d'art*, nos. 8–10, 1956, p. 262. English translation from Jacques Lassaigue, *Miró*, Skira, 1963, p. 124.

⁴² Robert Desnos, *Corps et biens*, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, p. 77. The poem is untranslatable.

associations, "*étoiles en des sexes d'escargot*" stimulates no immediate sensuous images. Nonetheless a hidden image is there; its key is to be found in another poetic device borrowed from Desnos: syntactic inversion.

An excellent example of syntactic inversion is found in the title of a poem by Desnos from the same collection, called *Coeur en bouche*.¹³ In this title, Desnos has inverted a common French idiomatic expression: "bouche en coeur" (literally: a mouth in the form of a heart).¹⁴ The inversion to "*coeur en bouche*" (or a heart in the form of a mouth) is at first glance meaningless; yet the original idiomatic meaning remains as a latent presence in the newly created word-form. This new phrase, conceptually suspended between meaning and non-meaning (or in this case, between sense and non-sense), is open to all interpretations and is thereby a much richer poetic form.

Usually in a simile, the second term supplies information about the first; this is true of *bouche en coeur*. Commonly, the first term of a simile remains relatively undetermined and is to be qualified by a more familiar image, such as "a storm roaring like a lion," or "night entering on wolves' feet" (both of which Desnos reversed in the same poem to read "a lion roaring like a storm" and "wolves entering on night's feet").¹⁵ In Miró's image as it is presented, it would be absurd to suppose that we could learn more about stars through a comparison with snails' genitals, the configuration of which is totally unfamiliar to us. Furthermore, there is a traditional saying in French folklore that snails have no "*sexe*."¹⁶

The absolute illogic of Miró's inscription stimulates questions rather than answers. However the reversed relationship between a familiar and a non-familiar image is subconsciously perceived as an aberration. This insight provides the first clue that Miró has inverted his syntax. Reversing the phrase to read "snails' genitals in the form of stars," an image begins to coalesce in our mind's eye.

An understanding of the inscription does not provide us with a consummate understanding of the painting which exists as a coherent sensuous entity in itself. However, it does inject sexual allusions into the imagery, such as (pubic) hair, and a star-shaped (sexual) symbol, and it invests the elliptical lines with loose associations to a snail's coil.

A final example of a *tableau-poème* in which Miró has appropriated specific devices from the poets is the painting "*Un oiseau poursuit une abeille et la baisse*" (cat. no. 25). The image itself is the closest parallel in Miró's oeuvre to a *calligramme*. The words, and the image they evoke, are plotted out according to the configuration of that image: the erratic trajectory of a bird's pursuit and the final consummation in the act of "lowering" (if that is in fact what Miró intended by "*baisse*").

¹³ Desnos, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹⁴ *Faire la bouche en coeur*, or to make a heart-shaped mouth, means to affect sweetness and innocence.

¹⁵ Desnos, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

¹⁶ The word *sexe* in French means both gender and genitals. In this particular saying, the meaning is that snails have no gender; they are hermaphroditic.

The alternate "*cils a bai-ser/cils a bai-ssés*" provides the specific clue to Miró's painting. Although these two homonymic phrases are visually and phonetically almost identical, they project two entirely different meanings. The first one reads "*cils à baisser*" (lashes to embrace). The second reads "*cils abaissés*" (lowered lashes).

Miró's inscription "*Un oiseau poursuit une abeille et la baisse*" conflates essentially the same two readings: "*et l'abaisse*" ("and lowers it" in correct French) and "*et la baise*" ("and embraces it"). However, Miró does not do us the favor of writing either form down, preferring the infinitely more provocative solution of an intermediate word-form which is grammatically empty. It is precisely the non-signifying nature of what is written which inspires our search for meaning beyond (but in proximity to) the written word. This is the implicit meaning of Desnos' poem: poetry is what lies beyond accepted "prison-forms."

"*Photo: ceci est la couleur de mes rêves*" (cat. no. 14) is a paradigm of Miró's poetic production and one of the artist's most enigmatic paintings. The least "painterly" of his works of this period, "*Photo*" is one of the richest in associative meanings.

At many levels, "*Photo*" is decidedly calligrammatic in the identification of words to an image-idea. On the level of immediate perception, the careful lettering with its thick and thin strokes and flourishes reveals that Miró sought, in his own way, to evoke printed copy. Print is the mechanical reproduction of handwriting, just as a "photo" is the mechanical reproduction of visible reality. We can therefore read the painting as follows: "This is a reproduction of the color of my dreams which is blue."

The most important question raised is the meaning of blue. The blue spot, as inconsequential as it appears, is perhaps the most loaded image on the canvas. Although it can be read literally as the color blue, one suspects—from experience—that Miró's true meaning lies elsewhere. Here blue is not just a visual entity but a symbol suggesting multiple readings. According to its most universal frame of reference, blue signifies hope, and dreams in this context are the images of hope. This is in keeping with Western symbolism, where blue is the color of hope, white represents faith and red represents charity. Moreover blue is particularly favored in Catalonia: Catalans paint their doors blue, indicating the sacred sanctuary of the home where personal ideals (dreams) can be nurtured as they cannot in the outside (real) world. The blue window in *The Tilled Field* is probably a displaced reference to this custom. The blue door also wards off evil spirits, as does a blue hand painted on doors in North Africa. Thus blue represents the Catalan peasant's birthright to dreams.

These meanings are contained in the picture. However, Miró has not said "Blue is the color of my dreams." In an elliptical manner, his statement is: "This blue spot is the color of my dreams," suggesting that the configuration of the spot may be as important as the color. Paradoxically, both the idea of "blue" and the appearance of the configuration are contained in the single word "*coulleur*." In French, *coulleur* denotes "complexion" or "coloring" in both a literal and a figurative sense (for example, political "coloring"). It also signifies the abstract concepts of character or substance. So that if blue is the color of Miró's dreams, the formless,

non-representational entity of the spot is their substance: as a receptacle for hallucinations, it is the stuff from which dreams and images can be drawn.

We know that in the early twenties Miró drew inspiration from formless stains on the wall of his studio. Miró has even said that the fundamental imagery of *The Harlequin's Carnival* (1924–25) came to him in hallucinations. The dominant rhythm of the latter painting—irrespective of any inherent pictorial necessity—is established by the motifs in blue. This seems to present a case for Miró's non-premeditated association of the color blue with dreams.

Finally, "Photo" must be considered in a broader frame of reference of both formal and metaphorical significance. Although other general visual references can be evoked (see discussion, cat. no. 14), none is more pertinent to the artist's profound intentions than Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* (fig. 20). Miró's admiration for Mallarmé is well known.⁴⁹ If he had not discovered him before coming to Paris, then he surely was introduced to his poetry by his neighbor André Masson who had illustrated *Un Coup de dés* in 1914. The motifs of dice in *The Family* (1924) and in *The Harlequin's Carnival* (1924–25) are Miró's earliest references to *Un Coup de dés*.⁵⁰ "Photo" is a more comprehensive visual and conceptual homage to the poem. Through the emptying of the picture plane (comparable to Mallarmé's emptying of the written page) and the concerted use of negative space to articulate the flow of image and content, Miró has made a literal and figurative allusion to Mallarmé's poem about the human condition.

The analogy is more significant than it may at first appear. Because the essential contradiction as conceived by Mallarmé was between the notion of *azur* or the unattainable spiritual heights, and that of the abyss—*le gouffre*—or metaphysical depths in the Baudelairean tradition. Once again this can be interpreted as the opposition of hope and despair, such as it is seen on Miró's canvas through a small blue patch on a limitless void.

Beginning in 1924, Miró executed a number of monochrome paintings in which traditional spatial cues are so radically eliminated as to have inspired the generic term "dream landscapes." These paintings are not spatially undefined; rather they are created according to a new set of pictorial premises.⁵¹ Most of the initial paintings of this series were painted in a monochrome blue.

Miró had learned to suspend his images simultaneously in space and on the surface of the canvas through the use of a Cubist scaffolding or grid (see cat. no. 8). Cubism had also taught him to signify a figure through a characteristic sign.⁵² According to Miró's interpretation, Cubism was grounded in physical reality. Therefore, in an attempt to break away from Cubist formalism, Miró opted for the color blue: the blue of the sky, namely, light, space, ether, in-

⁴⁹ See for example Roland Penrose, *op. cit.*, pp. 197–98.

⁵⁰ The 1924 painting *Man in a Tower* by André Masson (Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum) also includes the depiction of dice as a reference to Mallarmé.

⁵¹ See Rosalind Krauss, pp. 11–16, above.

⁵² A hat, a pipe, an accordion identifies a figure in a Cubist painting, as a red *baretina* signifies a Catalan peasant for Miró.

C'ÉTAIT
issu stellaire

LE NOMBRE

EXISTÂT-IL
autrement qu'hallucination éparse d'agonie

COMMENÇÂT-IL ET CESSÂT-IL
sourdant que nié et clos quand apparu
enfin
par quelque profusion répandue en rareté
SE CHIFFRÂT-IL

évidence de la somme pour peu qu'une
ILLUMINÂT-IL

LE HASARD

CE SERAIT
pire
non
davantage ni moins
indifféremment mais autant

Choit
la plume
rythmique suspens du sinistre
s'ensevelir
aux écumes originelles
naguères d'où sursauta son délire jusqu'à une cime
fiévre
par la neutralité identique du gouffre

Fig. 20. Stéphane Mallarmé. From *Le Coup de dés*, 1895

finitude. Free from all associations with the earth, gravity, and form, blue appeared to be the most appropriate hue for the suspension and the diffusion of images which were Miró's poetic concern.

Blue has been a favored color for many great Western artists: Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, to cite only three. However Miró's cultural heroes were elsewhere: they were Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Novalis and, in his own country, the Symbolist poet Rubén Darío.⁵³ Miró's blue paintings of 1925-26 and later of the sixties are not comparable in their use of blue to any other artist. Moreover no one else was producing blue paintings at this time. Somewhat later Dalí and Tanguy were to immerse their landscapes in an over-all blue light, as a means of emphasizing their unreality (or surreality). However, these artists maintained the conventions of illusionistic space, volume and gravity on which Miró had already turned his back by 1924.

Clearly, the poetic tradition was not a peripheral aspect of Miró's intellectual activity during this crucial formative period of his creative life. On the contrary, poetry was central, and a more pervasive force than it first appears. Poetry freed his imagination from acquired forms, and provided him with new techniques of invention and new images and symbols. Many of Miró's motifs and the manner in which they are interpreted and incorporated as subject matter come entirely from poetry. In other instances, where the images were inspired by other sources, they were reinforced or enhanced by poetic associations. Prevailing motifs such as ladders, wheels, flames, comets, biomorphic flowers; mythical creatures such as hydras, basilisks, lamias, although they may be found in pictorial sources such as Klee, Picabia, Arp, Romanesque frescoes and illuminations, are sustained through their poetic interpretations. A motif of singular significance for Miró is the almost fetishist importance attached to hair.⁵⁴ Hair has no privileged status in Impressionism, Cubism, Fauvism. The Dada painters did not honor it. However the erotico-poetic significance attributed to hair by Rimbaud and Lautréamont and the poetic tradition that stems from them is enormous and must be considered in its reference to Miró's obsession with this theme.

When poetry is so important in the life of an artist, and particularly at such a formative stage in his career, there is reason to believe that it will maintain its hold on his creative psyche, even if it moves underground.

In the twenties, Miró was one of the most poetic of painters. During the three subsequent decades, but for a few rare paintings and drawings, Miró eliminated this extreme emphasis on written poetry in order to concentrate on painting itself. From the point where he stood in 1927—at the extreme limits of spatial illusionism—there were only two alternatives: one, further development of his spatial structure which could have led him to the complete abstraction which he has consistently eschewed; the second, the elaboration of his poetic motifs

⁵³ Rubén Darío (1867-1916) was an Argentine symbolist poet whose first major collection of poetry—published in 1888—was called *Azul*. He had a particularly strong influence on Picasso's generation in Barcelona and may even have inspired Picasso's Blue Period.

⁵⁴ See Robert Motherwell, "The Significance of Miró," *Art News*, vol. 58, no. 4, May 1959, p. 65.

into a concrete language of signs. With the help of poetry, Miró had arrived at a highly personal pictorial idiom which he now developed on its own terms. The precise poetic cues which were in and on the paintings were progressively relegated to the titles. Symbols with which he had made tentative experiments in the twenties became the basis of his formal repertory. They have remained constant ever since: women, escape ladders, stars, snails, birds, flaming genitals, spiders, flowers.

According to Miró himself, at some point during this period, he became associated with the School of Paris. He was not to emerge from this primarily pictorial (as opposed to literary) tradition until approximately 1960. His artistic liberation, as he calls it, was accomplished through his exposure to the New American Painting, which he discovered first in the United States in 1947,⁵⁵ and subsequently in Paris in the early fifties.⁵⁶ This introduction to American painting encouraged him to turn his back on the School of Paris as four decades earlier he had turned his back on Cubism.

The break was not total, as it had virtually been in the early twenties. But there exists a group of paintings from the sixties, some of which have been brought together here, where concurrent with a search for solutions to visual problems, there is a will to poetic form. Specific poetic techniques and devices have been absorbed. Lines by poets long dead no longer come to mind. With the maturity of years and experience, Miró has become much more his own poet, only referring to outside inspiration in the broadest general terms.

In 1966, Miró visited Tokyo and Kyoto. As a Catalan and a native of Barcelona, he had been familiar with Japanese culture since his early youth.⁵⁷ Prior to his trip to Japan, Miró was already interested in Zen philosophy and Haiku poetry, subjects to which his friend the Japanese Surrealist Takiguchi⁵⁸ may have introduced him. Comparable to his instinctive grasp of Apollinaire's *calligrammes* was Miró's instinctive understanding of Japanese Haiku, and the titles of a number of his paintings are short poems in themselves. Furthermore, as a result of this visit to Japan, Miró's pictorial approach seems to have altered. The paintings executed on his return—in their sparseness and the expressive intensity of the sign—are the most "calligraphic" of his whole career.

Miró's renewed poetic orientation of the sixties is illustrated by three groups of paintings in which the poetic dimension is explored in three different ways. The first group consists of large

⁵⁵ In reference to his first trip to the United States in 1947, Miró told the authors that he was very impressed by the New American Painting.

⁵⁶ Miró visited Jackson Pollock's first Paris one-man exhibition in 1952 at the Studio Paul Facchetti and told the authors that it was a "revelation" to him. Important group shows of American artists were held in Paris in 1951-52.

⁵⁷ Dupin reports that due to Barcelona's importance as a seaport, Japanese objects and prints could be found there as early as the late nineteenth century. Jacques Dupin, "Introduction," *Joan Miró Exhibition, Japan*, 1966, p. 15. In this reference, see Miró's early (1917) *Portrait of E. C. Ricart* (called *The Man in Pajamas*) where the artist glued a Japanese print on the canvas.

⁵⁸ The Japanese poet Takiguchi wrote the first monograph on Miró in 1956.

single canvases inflected by the sparsest registration of signs, and accompanied by richly evocative titles. The second group of paintings contains more complex visual imagery and the titles allude specifically to the written poetic idiom. The third group are large-scale mural paintings.

The titles of the first group of paintings recall the spare yet allusive constellations of words characteristic of Haiku poetry: *The Passage of the Migratory Bird* (Fig. 21), *Hair Pursued by Two Planets* (cat. no. 52), *Drop of Water on the Rose-Colored Snow* (cat. no. 51), *The Smile of the Star to the Twin Tree of the Plain* (cat. no. 49), *Man and Woman in front of the Azure* (cat. no. 60). Functioning as parallel poetry, the titles illustrate a complex poetic effect which is signaled on the canvas by a disembodied sign. These paintings are arrived at through a distillation of images. Since they are paintings with precise but veiled meanings, their ultimate effects depend on the coincidence of verbal and visual poetic images.

Thus in these highly unified colored or non-color fields, Miró is not merely attempting to solve pictorial problems. Each of these paintings exists as a "magnetic field" upon which constellations of meaning—both visual and verbal—coalesce, are integrated, and are then projected as a single poetic image.

The second group of paintings illustrates the same phenomenon: *Song of the Vowels* (1967), *Words of the Poet* (cat. no. 58), *Poem I* (cat. no. 55), II, and III (cat. no. 54), *Song on White Background* (1967). However the coefficients of meaning exist in a different relationship to each other and to the final effect. The visual propositions in these paintings are more articulate in themselves; the title merely serves to situate the frame of reference. Paintings such as the series *Poem I, II and III*, and *Letters and Numbers Attracted by a Spark* (cat. nos. 55–57) indicate how far Miró has developed in his concept of poetry. Generically, they could still be interpreted as *tableaux-poèmes* but what was once a word or a poetic simile has been reduced to a linguistic sign.

The large-scale paintings of the third group are among the most daring works Miró has made to date. In the placement of a few black lines or single spots of color on an evenly saturated field, these paintings are comparable to the painting of 1925, "Photo."⁵⁹ Only the scale, hue and poetic images have changed. The confrontation of an open space by an individual will to create (and thereby exist) is essentially the same, and once again the frame of reference is Mallarmé's creation and positioning of form-meanings on the open (blank) page.⁶⁰

Wordless, anonymous poems, these monumental paintings exist as wordless constellations, wordless *calligrammes*, close in physical and metaphysical spirit to both Mallarmé and Apollinaire. They are *calligrammes* because their content—the hazardous itinerary of the erring human condition—is visibly projected through the tenuous searching trajectory of each line. They are constellations through the units of meaning or signs which exist midway between disintegration and cosmic order of the open field. These are not "color field" paintings in the American sense. Although Miró is also solving pictorial problems, his titles reveal meta-

⁵⁹ See cat. no. 14 and discussion pp. 60–61 this catalogue.

⁶⁰ Miró's self-avowed affinity to *Un Coup de dés* is documented in Roland Penrose, *op. cit.*, pp. 197–98.

physical preoccupations: *Paintings for the Cell of a Solitary Man*, *Mural Paintings for a Temple* (cat. nos. 42-44), *Blue I*, *Blue II*, *Blue III* (cat. nos. 39-41).

As noted earlier, the poet-seer (Rimbaud, Mallarmé) aspires to the unattainable, the Totality, the "Azure." It is clearly no accident that Miró's first series of three monumental paintings was a cosmic blue. The ideal aim of such artists is to transcend the existential self in order to attain the anonymous self. This was expressed by Mallarmé in the following passage:

*... je suis maintenant impersonnel ... une aptitude qu'a l'Univers Spirituel à se voir et à se développer, à travers ce qui fut moi. Fragile, comme est mon apparition terrestre, je ne puis subir que les développements absolument nécessaires pour que l'Univers retrouve, en ce moi, son identité.*⁶¹

I am now impersonal ... a potential in which the Spiritual Universe may see itself reflected and may develop through what was once my self. Fragile, like my earthly appearance, I can only submit to the absolutely necessary developments, so that the Universe may recover its identity in this self.

This idea of the identification of the self to the Universe is comparable to the Japanese calligrapher's and the Haiku poet's spiritual position. It is Miró's objective as well, although he expresses it in less mystical terms: "Anonymity," Miró says, "allows me to renounce myself but in renouncing myself I come to affirm myself more strongly The same practice makes me seek the noise hidden in silence, the movement in immobility, life in the inanimate, the infinite in the finite, forms in space and myself in anonymity."⁶² It is through anonymity that the specificity of the human condition may be transcended. Only then might the vicissitudes of chance and error be abolished. Yet, the risks are great. Miró knows that in every human action, not the sublime but the human will emerge. This is the ultimate poetic act: a casting of the dice or *Un Coup de dés*.

⁶¹ Mallarmé, in a letter of May 14, 1867 to Cazalis. Robert Greer Cohn, *Mallarmé's Un Coup de dés: an exegesis*, A Yale French Studies Publication, 1949, p. 126.

⁶² Miró, quoted in Roland Penrose, *op. cit.*, p. 194.



Fig. 21. Joan Miró. *Flight of the Migratory Bird*. 1968. Private collection

For reasons of clarity we have treated the work of the "magnetic fields" on two separate levels: "the structure" and "the poetics." Yet the danger is that a basic misunderstanding may arise from this procedure. For it might be thought from the first essay that Miró's formal ambitions—to break through what he saw as the moribund propositions of Cubism into a totally new kind of space—drove him by 1924–25 to construct a world whose very openness held the threat of emptiness: an emptiness which Miró then filled with the images and ideas of the poets dear to the Surrealists. Conversely, it might be understood from the second essay that Miró's response to that poetry, which began by 1924 to affect nearly every image he made, led him almost as an afterthought to create a new space: one that could contain without contradiction or interruption the implications of that poetry. In short, the authors have run the risk of summoning up that ancient ghost which haunts discussions of art by enforcing an uneasy split between form and content.

Yet we understand these two issues—poetry and structure in Miró's art—as being completely continuous one with another. If Miró had always refused to compress the space of his world into the narrow pictorial confines of Cubism, if he had always demanded that painting release him into a deep space of light and color, one feels that this was a function of a sensibility already affected by the Symbolist poetry of his native Catalonia, and strengthened by his profound response to the poets he read and met with when he came to Paris. If he knew from the moment he arrived that Cubism and Dada were things of the past, it is because this knowledge had been some years in preparation. Thus the painter, who begins probably in the summer of 1923 and certainly by the winter of 1923–24 to re-invent his pictorial world, to remake it on grounds of both form and content, is responding to a deep internal necessity. It is the necessity of an aesthetic conscience which tells him that his own emotions have to do with sensuous release into a space that unites self-consciousness with the merging of the self in the world beyond it. Such emotions parallel with extreme closeness those of Desnos, for example in *Corps et biens*, or those of Eluard when he writes:

Soleil tremblant

Signal vide et signal a l'éventail d'horloge

Aux caresses unies d'une main sur le ciel

Aux oiseaux entr'ouvrant le livre des aveugles

Et d'une aile après l'autre entre cette heure et l'autre

Dessinant l'horizon faisant tourner les ombres

Qui limitent le monde quand j'ai les yeux baissés.¹

Trembling sun

Open signal and signal like a fan-shaped dial

Like the united caresses of one hand on the sky

With birds opening up the book of the blind

And of one wing after the other between this hour and the next

Drawing the horizon, resifting the shadows

Which limit the world when I lower my eyes.

On his own terms, the terms he knew as a painter, Miró creates a world in which it can be said: "Elle imagine que l'horizon a pour elle dénoué sa ceinture."² And that is not a world which can contemplate imagery divorced from the formal means which create it. The "magnetic fields" operate on a mutual attraction between poetry and the space that was invented to hold it—for the poetry already implied that space, and for Miró the space was meaningless without the poetry.

¹ Paul Eluard, *Répétitions*, Au sans pareil, Paris, 1922. This is from the poem "A Côté."

² "She imagines that the horizon has unknotted its belt for her." This is from "La Grande maison inhabitable," in *Répétitions*.

1 *The Tilled Field* 1925

La Terre labourée

Oil on canvas, 26 x 37" (66 x 94 cm.)

Signed and dated lower left: Miró, // 1925 24.

Collection Harold Diamond, New York

Dupin no. 82

PROVENANCE:

The artist

Galerie Pierre, Paris

Paul Eluard, Paris

René Galfé, Brussels

London Gallery, London

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

Henry Clifford, 1941

To present owner, 1972





Fig. 22. Joan Miró. *The Farm*. 1921–22. Private collection

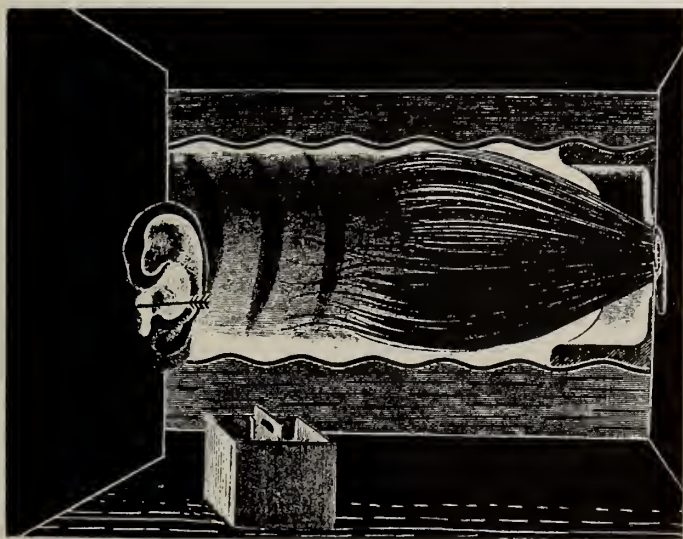


Fig. 23. Max Ernst. *Nettoyage des Carreaux*. 1922

The Tilled Field was started in the summer of 1923 at Miró's family farm in Montroig along with *The Hunter* (cat. no. 2) and *Pastoral* (cat. no. 3). All three works were completed the following winter in Paris. *The Tilled Field*, as the first of the three, is rightly considered the transitional work between an earlier succession of tentative styles and Miró's mature poetic idiom.

A comparison of *The Tilled Field* to *The Farm* (fig. 22), a painting executed two years earlier in similar circumstances, is informative. *The Farm* shows a fairly faithful rendering of the familiar landscape at Montroig. Painted in a *détailliste* manner, *The Farm* allegedly has Japanese prints and Persian miniatures as its stylistic sources. As in the latter, each motif is treated with meticulous care. The unity of the image lies in the depiction of a single well-defined subject. Although *The Tilled Field* is also a unified image, its unity cannot be defined either in terms of its sources or its subject. The references inherent in the painting are essentially four-fold: they can be identified as Medieval imagery, the farm at Montroig, fictions of the artist's imagination and poetry.

A number of aspects of the painting indicate that the artist's approach to his subject has undergone a radical change. The colors of *The Tilled Field* are not the crisp daylight hues of *The Farm*, but the muted—nocturnal and supernatural—tones of Romanesque frescoes. Whereas the composition of *The Farm* was essentially that of an all-over pattern, with equal emphasis on each motif in relation to the whole, *The Tilled Fields* shows a definite hierarchy of forms which is based on the artist's private and irrational scale of values.

The fundamental structure of *The Tilled Field* can be defined as three horizontal bands. Reading from top to bottom as sky, sea, earth, this form of composition is common to the Catalan Romanesque frescoes Miró knew well. Other motifs of Medieval inspiration include some of the imagery in the lower right of the canvas: the lizard with conic cap, the pine tree—a transposition of the archetypal image of the tree of life (see fig. 25)—the decorative patterning and silhouettes of the fish and serpent, and the extreme stylization of the rooster, which is remarkable when one compares it to the rooster in *The Farm*. The pine cone encrusted with tiny eyes recalls the eyes found on the bodies of animals and the wings of seraphim in early Medieval art (see fig. 24). To the left of center of the canvas can be seen an irrigation ditch. The heavy shading and flowing curves derive from



Fig. 24. Fragment from the apse of St. Climent de Taull, Lerida, Spain, 1125 A. D.



Fig. 25. Commentary on the Book of the Apocalypse, Gerona, Spain, 975 A.D.

the stylistic conventions to signify water found in Catalan frescoes.

Miró's source of inspiration was not solely Medieval imagery. Many of the motifs seen here appeared two years earlier in *The Farm*: the cactus in the upper left, the goat (now gnawing on a cactus leaf), the farmhouse covered with cracks and vines, the horse, the dog. In the lower right, one sees again the lizard, the snail, the rooster and two rabbits. Even the "tilled field" which gives the painting its name is found on the far right in *The Farm*. The overturned pail (now encircling the lizard) and the folded newspaper occur here also for the second time.

Aside from Medieval sources and motifs from the Montroig landscape, there is another category of imagery in *The Tilled Field* which is not immediately recognizable. This includes the stylized fig tree—the dominant motif in the left portion of the painting—and the ear on the trunk of the pine tree on the right.

The fig-tree motif is a pure fiction of Miró's imagination. It is a conflated image of a fig tree and a frontier-post, situated on the border between France and Spain. On the right of the upright pole is the flag of Spain; the two flags on the left are those of Catalonia and France, whereas the branch- semaphore extended on the French side bears the flag of Italy. It is of interest to note that Miró shows his allegiance to France by placing the Catalan flag on the French side of the border.

Miró's image of the disembodied ear on the trunk of the pine tree, as original as it is, is not a unique example of this motif in the art of the period. In 1922, Max Ernst and Paul Eluard collaborated on an illustrated book of poetry: *Les Malheurs des immortels*. One of the collages by Max Ernst depicts a gigantic ear affixed by an arrow to a windowpane (fig. 25). The isolated ear appeared once again in a mural panel entitled *Le Réveil officiel du serin* (*The Canary's Official Awakening*) that Ernst painted for Eluard's house at Eaubonne in 1925. This time the ear was attached to a musical (brass) instrument. Although Miró has said that he merely wanted to depict "a living tree, with eyes that see and ears that hear,"¹ in view of his close friendship with Eluard starting in 1920–21, there is a strong possibility that he knew these works.

¹ In conversation with the authors, June 1972.

The remaining motifs can be described simply. The bird in the sky, resembling a mechanical toy and which Miró likens to an arrow, evokes the diagrammatic drawings of Picabia;² it anticipates the automata or wind-up-toy-like figures which appear frequently in Miró's œuvre from that time on. The peculiar configurations of the clouds can be compared to cloud formations by Henri Rousseau, and, in particular, those found in his self-portrait of 1890, which was well-known in Paris.³ The plowing figure on the right is inspired by the prehistoric cave paintings at Altamira which Miró knew. The sail on the horizon and the planted furrow placed diagonally and to the lower right of the farmhouse need no further explanation here.

It is astonishing that from such disparate visual material—all of which remains legible and thus close to its original form—Miró has created a unified image. The unity of *The Tilled Field* resides not in the subject but in the vision the work projects, a vision of a naïvely supernatural world. Naïve form and supernatural content are two characteristics of early Medieval art. Parallel to Medieval art, a unified vision which can only exist in the mind interrelates the diverse motifs in *The Tilled Field*. The unity of the canvas is not visual but para-visual, and in this case the source of the artist's vision is not in religious belief but in poetry.

The poetic source which oriented Miró's vision was Guillaume Apollinaire's *L'Enchanteur pourrissant*.⁴ The hero of Apollinaire's poetic work was the Medieval wizard Merlin. In Apollinaire's version of the legend, Merlin is trapped in a tomb by Viviane, "the lady of the lake." Since he is only half mortal, having been begotten by the devil, his body dies but not his soul. As Merlin lies there, he is visited by all the bestiary of the forest who come to him in hopes of acquiring magical skills.

One can conjecture that the lizard in the lower right area of *The Tilled Field* is Merlin the wizard, fitted with his traditional conic hat. The water pail which encircles

him signifies the tomb in which he is entrapped. The tomb, as in Apollinaire's text, is at the edge of a lake. This identification of particular images further explains the eye in the foliage and the ear on the trunk of the tree: the scene is set in an enchanted forest.

As noted above, most of the animals placed around the tree were found in *The Farm*. The two exceptions are the serpent and the fish, both of which appear in *L'Enchanteur*. Serpents are the first visitors to Merlin's tomb. The fish is evoked by a druid who is trying to "*redevenir poisson*" or return to the state of a fish.⁵

It is however in Apollinaire's final chapter, presented as a monologue by Merlin, that the most striking parallel imagery occurs. Since the chapter is long, and the images are scattered throughout it, we shall be obliged to excerpt them here:

*Les charbons du ciel étaient si proches que je craignais leur ardeur*⁶... *Deux animaux dissemblables s'accouplaient*... *Mais le chant des champs labourés était merveilleux*... *mes yeux multipliés me couronnaient attentivement*... *Et l'île, à la dérive, alla combler un golfe où du sable aussitôt poussèrent des arbres rouges*... *Le ciel était plein de fèces et d'oignons*... *Je visitai*... *des chaumières abandonnées*... *Des vaisseaux d'or, sans matelots, passaient à l'horizon*... *Des ombres dissemblables assombrissaient de leur amour l'écarlate des voilures, tandis que mes yeux se multipliaient dans les fleuves*...⁷

⁵ Apollinaire, *L'Enchanteur pourrissant*, Gallimard, Paris, 1972, p. 25.

⁶ The metaphor of burning coals in the sky could be associated with Miró's image of the sun in *The Hunter*, although this is not its usual interpretation (see cat. no. 2).

⁷ "The coals in the sky were so close that I feared their ardent glow... two dissimilar animals were coupling... but the song of the tilled fields was wonderful... my multiplied eyes formed an attentive crown... And the island, floating free, came to rest in a gulf where red trees sprang from the sand... the sky was full of feces and onions... I visited... abandoned thatched cottages... Sailorless gold ships passed on the horizon... Dissimilar shadows darkened their scarlet sails with love, while my eyes multiplied in the rivers..." (Apollinaire, *op. cit.*, pp. 87–90.)

² The bird also evokes Paul Klee. However, it is difficult to ascertain exactly when Miró discovered Klee's work. See discussion cat. no. 9.

³ Miró's admiration for Rousseau is documented (see J. T. Soby, *Joan Miró*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1959, p. 24).

⁴ See p. 53 this catalogue.

In Miró's free interpretation of these images, the two coupling animals are transformed into a mare nursing her foal. The "*champs labourés*" have become "*la terre labourée*." The multiplication of eyes, and the red tree growing at the edge of a gulf are represented. Miró's farmhouse is dilapidated and abandoned. Apollinaire's scarlet sails on the horizon, darkened by shadows, have been translated into delicate pink sails tinged with scarlet.

The sky full of "feces and onions" requires further explanation. In Miró's *The Harlequin's Carnival* of 1924-25, a mythical insect perched on the male figure's mustache is seen dropping what Miró has identified as excrement. These same round shaded gray motifs are found in the darkened sky in the upper right of *The Tilled Field*. Moreover, the pine-cone motif derives from Miró's frequent depictions of onions with long tails, as found in *Still Life with Rabbit*, 1920, *The Family*, 1924, and *Nude*, 1926.

Hence, despite the complexity of Miró's sources, *The Tilled Field* projects an extremely coherent image, based on a unified poetic vision. Apollinaire, in his preface to *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, defined Surrealism as an invention after nature which in fact creates a new reality.⁸ In *L'Enchanteur pourrissant*, Apollinaire took a Medieval legend and translated it by means of a highly imaginative poetic idiom into a new image of "surreality." Miró has done the same here. As such, *The Tilled Field* is his first Surrealist painting.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

2 *The Hunter* (*Catalan Landscape*) 1925–24
Le Chasseur (*Paysage Catalan*)

Oil on canvas, 25³/₈ x 39³/₈" (65 x 100 cm.)

Signed and dated lower left: Miró. // 1925–24.

Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York,
Purchase, 1936

Dupin no. 84

PROVENANCE:

The artist

André Breton, Paris

Mme. Simone Collinet, Paris

To present owner, 1936



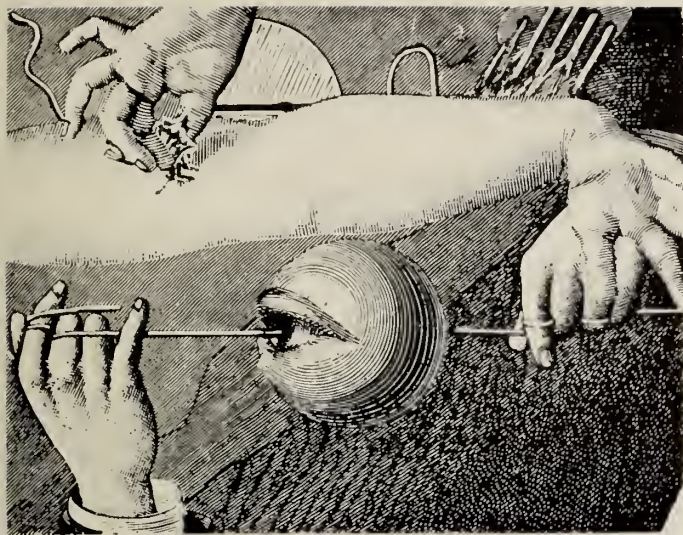


Fig. 26. Collage from *Répétitions*. 1922

The Hunter was begun in the summer of 1923, following the first winter of Miró's relationship with Masson and the poets who were to become Surrealists. In his major study of Miró's art, Jacques Dupin speaks of Miró's disavowal at this point of the realism of his earlier style. "It had become impossible," Dupin says of Miró, "for him to wrest anything further from external reality."¹ Discussing *The Tilled Field* and *The Hunter*, Dupin speaks of the pressures on Miró from the Surrealists' demand that artists take up a more visionary subject-matter, and thereby affirm the continuity between the external world and an internal reality of dream and fantasy. But even before the Surrealists made their official appeal, the idea of visionary subjects had permeated the poetic circles of the young avant-garde, and this idea had affected the visual imagery of the early 1920s. In various avant-garde magazines the image of a disembodied eye, appearing as an illustration for a text, had come to stand for the personae of the poets and writers as seers.² In the cover illustration for Eluard's *Répétitions*, 1922, Max Ernst used a detached eye, pierced by a line or thread which is held by two hands (fig. 26). The reference here seems to be a line of sight which is continuous from one side of the eye to the other, that is, between internal and external vision. Perspective diagrams from the 15th century onward often show an eye with sight-lines projecting from it as a way of representing the cone of vision as it intersects the portion of the external world seen from a given point. Ernst's collage from *Répétitions* takes this traditional way of diagramming vision, and redirects it to serve the concerns he shared with his contemporaries.

Ernst's collage seems to provide a specific reading for one of the most prominent and puzzling images in *The Hunter*, namely the eye at the picture's center attached to a disk and pierced by the horizon line.³ Not only does

¹ Jacques Dupin, *Joan Miró*. Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1962, p. 137.

² See for example, "Chef-d'œuvre," 391, vol. "Le Pilhaou-Thibaou," July 1921, p. 5.

³ Simone Collinet identified the detached eye in "Sourire de ma blonde" as "œil-horizon." See cat. no. 5.

Miró's image share with Ernst's the motif of the transected eye, but both of them portray the pupil of the eye on the globe of the full disembodied eyeball. To understand the image as it appears in *The Hunter*, it is important to note that Miró himself has spoken of crossing the horizon by the trajectory of his vision which unites earth and sky along a vertical axis.⁴ Another trajectory which crosses the horizon is also involved here: one which extends backward and forward in depth, moving from the subjective space behind the painter's eye out towards the outposts of external, objective reality. The eye is, then, literally the hub of this painting, connecting its external vanishing point and the internal source of its imagery. (Note the three lines of sight which both project from and vanish into the point at the center of the pupil.) Although this imagery is in part a projection of fantasy, it is also the product of conventional sign-systems for representing the world—those of language for example. Thus the internality Miró refers to is a far more complex one than simply that of personal fantasy. It refers to a whole variety of projective languages.⁵

One of the conventional signs Miró uses appears in the word-fragment "Sard" written in the painting's lower right corner. This word has been interpreted in two conflicting ways in the literature on this work. One of the earliest interpretations is that it is the first syllable of *sardana*—the name of a Catalan folk-dance.⁶ Other scholars have read it as a fragment of the word *sardine*—seeing it as a label for the creature in the foreground which is a fish.⁷ (Miró represents fish elsewhere in these years in a similar manner: a semi-circular wedge for the head and a triangular tail connected by a linear shaft—the head sometimes shown with a long ear-like fin waving above it.)⁸

At the left side of the painting, the hunter stands, cap on his head (see cat. no. 8), rabbit in one hand, and gun in the other. His body is reduced to line; the stem-like torso connects his flaming heart and his genitals (see cat. no. 20). In the sea behind him on the right is a metallic cone carrying the flag of Spain, probably an image of an armored ship,⁹ and on the left a device with ladder and wheel carrying the crossed flags of Catalonia and France.¹⁰ In the sky the sun appears as a modeled lozenge with tentacle-like rays. Although attempts have been made to connect this depiction of the sun with religious images of the Sacred Heart,¹¹ there is probably stronger evidence, given its appearance elsewhere in Miró's work, to read it as a more eroticized image. This representation of the sun reoccurs in the sky of *The Harlequin's Carnival*, where it rhymes visually with the creature at the center of the carnival which Miró identified as "a woman's sex in the form of a spider."¹² And it strikingly resembles the bulb with projecting roots which Miró uses to portray the female genitals in the 1924 work, *The Family* (Dupin, p. 206).

Two images in *The Hunter* probably reflect the appeal de Chirico's work had for the Surrealists as well as for Miró. The draftsman's triangle which appears in the lower left corner (and reappears in many paintings of the mid-1920s, see cat. no. 3), has a clear precedent in the series of metaphysical still lifes which de Chirico painted in the late teens. The three pairs of cones and spheres also relate to the geometric shapes which inhabited those de Chiricos: the dotted lines indicating movement recall the stitched seams seen on de Chirico's mannequins.

⁴ In discussion with the authors.

⁵ See text above, pp. 18 ff.

⁶ James Johnson Sweeney, *Joan Miró*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1941, p. 28. Also, Gerta Moray, "Miró, Bosch and Fantasy Painting," *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 115, no. 820, July 1971, p. 591.

⁷ Dupin, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

⁸ *Ibid.* See drawing, p. 161, and the painting D. 157.

⁹ Moray, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ The mode of rendering is close to the automata Miró drew in 1924 (see cat. no. 5). Dupin identifies this image as the airplane that had begun to pass over Montroig on the newly opened route between Toulouse and Rabat. Dupin, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

¹¹ Moray, *loc. cit.*

¹² "Un sexe de femme en forme d'araignée..." Joan Miró, *L'œuvre*, no. 4, 1959, p. 85.

3 *Pastoral* 1923-24

Pastorale

Oil and charcoal on canvas, $23\frac{5}{8} \times 35\frac{7}{8}$ " (60 x 91 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1923-24.

Private Collection.

Dupin no. 83

PROVENANCE:

Pierre Matisse, New York

To present owner



Begun in the summer of 1925, *Pastoral* schematizes the landscape in a manner that is even more reduced than that of *The Hunter*. Some of the elements in *Pastoral* are familiar from the paintings that preceded it that summer, others are harder to read. The fish swimming in a pond at one end of which is a rabbit's hutch (or hole) evokes the right side of *The Tilled Field* (cat. no. 1).¹ The cow in the center of *Pastoral* relates to the horse at the center of *The Tilled Field*, but the animal is now simplified in the manner of the Majorcan plaster toys Miró was fond of collecting.² Similarly, the form in the center background with smoke coming out of one side recalls the farmhouse in the same position in *The Tilled Field*. To the right of that house in *Pastoral* is an imaginary structure symbolized by the draftsman's triangle which appeared in a more minor role in *The Hunter*. To the left of the central farmhouse is a third structure which is much more enigmatic until one recalls the 1918 *House with Palm Tree* (D. 59), a work which clarifies this form in *Pastoral*. In the 1918 picture a palm with feathery fronds stands in front of a house whose simple, four-square silhouette is interrupted only by the semi-circular protuberance of a sundial at the level of the cornice line. The lines of the dial radiate out to the numerals 9, 10, 11, 12, etc.; and above the door of the house is the inscription and date: "ANY 1912." In *Pastoral*, house, sundial and palm are compressed into a simple shape, scored by two horizontal lines with "9" and "10" at their left ends, and "A." at the upper right.³ The "9" and "10" recollect the numerals on the sundial and the "A." is probably a reference to the date carried by the original house.⁴ Arching above these houses is a sign for a rainbow. Elsewhere Miró uses this device of parallel arcs for clouds (fig. 2), and later signifies clouds simply by

¹ This configuration of a fish in a pond can be found in Catalan Romanesque imagery. (See fig. 21.)

² They are called *ciurells*. See Robert Desnos' description of them in Miró's studio in the early 1920s, in *Cahiers d'art*, vol. 9, nos. 1-4, 1934, pp. 25-26.

³ Klee also uses this device of numbers or letters related to horizontal lines which score the image. See e. g. *Paroles parcimonieuses de l'avare*, reproduced in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, vol. 1, no. 5, April 15, 1925, p. 21.

⁴ This image of the house and sundial appears again in *The Upset* (D. 94) where it is even further schematized.



Fig. 27. *Commentary on the Book of the Apocalypse*. Girona, Spain, 975 A. D.

stacked parallel straight lines (cat. no. 29), a device probably drawn from the earlier depiction of the rainbow. The bulbous figure on the far right is an adaptation of the female form developed from studies of kerosene lamps which Miró was doing at this time (Dupin, p. 159 and p. 146). Later, remembering this period, Miró wrote, "by the light of an oil lamp fine haunches of a woman between the tuft of the guts and the stem with a flame . . ."⁵ Below the woman is a little wind up toy like the one Miró drew in 1924 and labeled "A" for "automaton" (Dupin, p. 144). The legs of the toy form an "M" which relates graphically to two "Rs" printed next to it. Together the forms suggest Miró's signature.

⁵ "...à l'éclairage d'une lampe à pétrole belles hanches de femme entre la mèche des boyaux et tige avec une flamme . . ." Joan Miró, *Œuvre*, no. 4, 1959, p. 85.

4 *Portrait of Madame B.* 1924

Portrait de Madame B.

Tempera on canvas, $51\frac{1}{8} \times 37\frac{3}{4}$ " (130 x 96 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1924.

Private Collection, New York

Dupin no.91

PROVENANCE:

The artist

Galerie Pierre, Paris

Rene Gaffé, Brussels

Roland Penrose, London, 1937

To present owner, 1958

Painted in his Paris studio on the rue Blomet in the spring of 1924, *Portrait of Madame B.* is the first of a series of paintings with yellow grounds which Miró developed that summer in Montroig. The subject is from Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, and this inspiration drawn from Jarry is not without precedent. In 1923, Max Ernst did a painting called *Ubu Imperator*.

The unusual figure of the woman as it is found here is a variant of a kerosene-lamp interpreted by Miró as the female silhouette. This image first appears in 1924. Miró will subsequently develop this woman-lamp image, but with a shift of focus: no longer the representation of a complete female figure, the lamp will allude specifically to a flaming vagina. In this form, the kerosene lamp is found in a drawing and a painting by the same title executed after Miró's return to Paris in the fall of 1924 (Dupin, p. 143 and D.88).

The title of the painting, *Portrait of Madame B.*, alludes to a young woman Miró knew at that time in Paris. Usually understood as "Madame Breton," this interpretation is false. For an extensive discussion of the literary sources see pp. 41-45.



5 "Sourire de ma blonde" 1924

Tempera on canvas, 54 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 45 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (88 x 115 cm.)
Signed and dated lower left: Miró. // 1924.
Collection Simone Collinet, Paris
Dupin no. 97

PROVENANCE:

The artist
Max Morise, Paris
To present owner, c. 1932



This is the last of the series of paintings on yellow tempera grounds which Miró executed in the summer of 1924 in Montroig. It is inspired by the French song "Auprès de ma blonde," as are two works from the following year: "*Bonheur d'aimer ma brune*" (D. 126a) and "*Le corps de ma brune*" (cat. no. 15).

The first of the radiating motifs (on the extreme left) can be interpreted either as an ear (compare with the ear with three hairs in *The Tilled Field*, cat. no. 1) or as testicles, also a plausible reading in this context. It is

furthermore interesting to note that the central motif of the eye¹ recalls the eye/horizon/line-of-vision motif found in *The Hunter* (cat. no. 2), started exactly one year earlier, and in *The Family*; (The Museum of Modern Art, New York), painted earlier in 1924 in Paris. For a discussion of literary references, see pp. 45–50.

¹ Madame Simone Collinet refers to this motif as "*œil, en même temps qu'horizon, comme dans le chasseur catalan*" ("an eye, and at the same time the horizon, like in *The Hunter*"). Letter to the authors, April 1972.

6 *The Kiss* 1924

Le Baiser

Oil on canvas, 28³/₄ × 35⁷/₈" (73 × 91 cm.)

Signed and dated lower left: Miró. // 1924.

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Barry R. Peril, Rydale, Pennsylvania

Dupin no. 98

PROVENANCE:

The artist

Galerie Pierre, Paris, sold 1925

Resor Collection, New York

G. David Thompson Collection, Pittsburgh

Harold Diamond, New York

Richard Feigen Gallery, New York

To present owner



The image of *The Kiss* relates to a series of works done in 1925 which show the touching and sometimes the fusion between a male and a female figure. The name of the works in this series—like *The Lovers*, *The Kiss*, *The Coitus*—are not Miró's, who has made known his dislike for these titles.¹ In this painting, which calls to mind Miró's contemporaneous transformation of the globe of the kerosene lamp, male and female are simplified to two globe-shaped forms. In drawings of 1924 the lamp is likened to the female body—the flame and its rays of heat made to double as genitalia. (See cat. nos. 5, 20.)

¹ Dupin, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

Here the two forms fuse at a single point to create a continuous figure in the shape of the sign for infinity: ∞. The flame-like lines spreading from the right half of this composite identify it as the female part of the image. The most reduced and sign-like of all the works in this series, the painting's treatment of the notion of coupling by means of the symbol ∞ also includes—within the image of the figures—a notion of their space. It suggests that that space is simultaneously the infinity of an internal emotion and the infinity of a point where sight focuses at the horizon of the external field.

The green ground is rare in Miró's work of this period.

7 *Painting* 1925/64

Peinture

Oil on canvas, 54 1/2 x 45 1/2" (87.6 x 115.5 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1925; on reverse: Joan Miró // 1925. // 14/IX/64

Penrose Collection, London

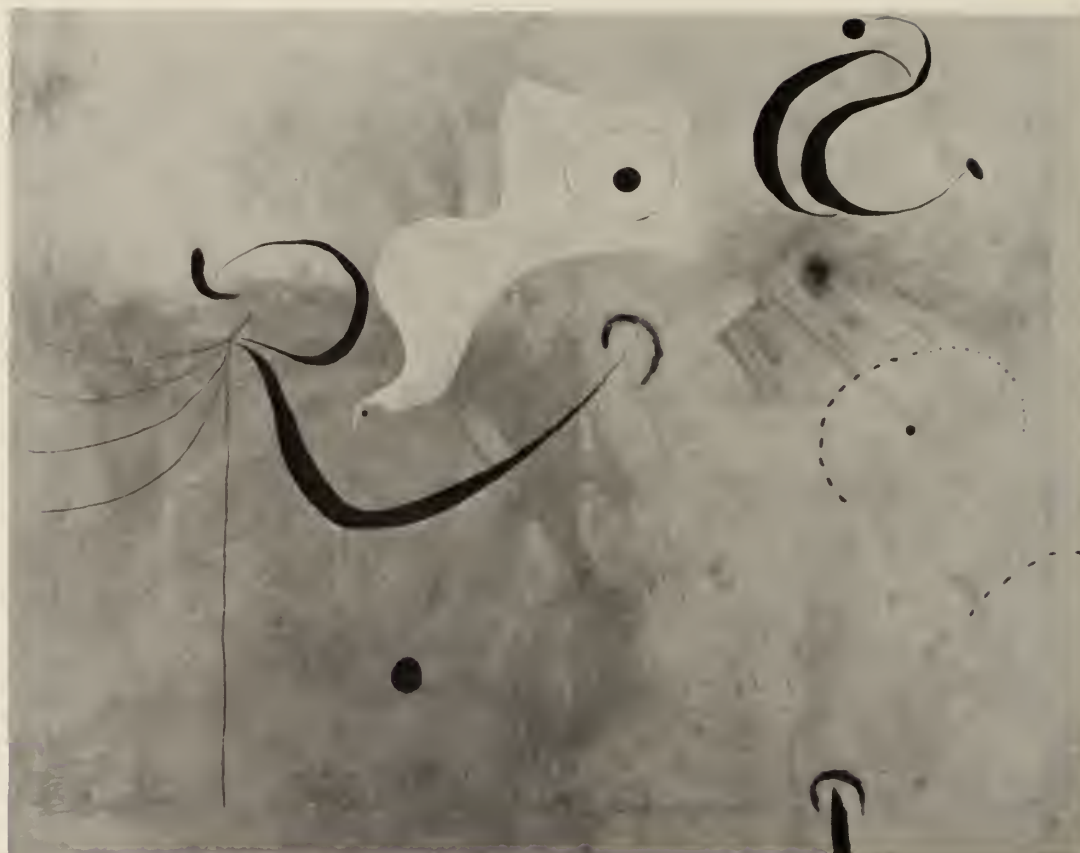
PROVENANCE:

The artist

Galerie Pierre, Paris

René Gaffé, Brussels

To present owner, 1937



A ghost-like form suspended within a blue field, the imagery of this painting is extremely close to that of *The Siesta* (cat. no. 13), a work probably painted very soon after this one. In *The Siesta* the white form is identified by the artist as a figure asleep on a beach—its head inclined towards the upper right corner of the painting where the number “12” signals the time of day. In *Painting* the figure with a single eye seems to stare at the letter “a” executed in elaborate calligraphy. Two spheric shapes occur at the right which recall the dotted circular shape in *The Siesta* which is a figure swimming near the beach. At the left of *Painting* is an enigmatic form which

looks like the flagpole and banner that appears in another work of 1925, also evoking a seascape (D. 120). At the tips of this banner are two tiny black arcs which Miró added to this work in 1964. Roland Penrose reports that when Miró came to England in 1964 at the time of a large retrospective of his work at the Tate Gallery, he saw this painting which had been damaged many years before. Responding to the fine stains that were spattered across its surface, Miró added the two arcs, three black dots, and at its bottom edge, a pictograph for a bird in flight.

8 *Head of a Catalan Peasant* 1925

Tête de paysan catalan

Oil on canvas, $55\frac{7}{8} \times 28\frac{3}{4}$ " (91 x 73 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1925.

Penrose Collection, London

Dupin no. 110

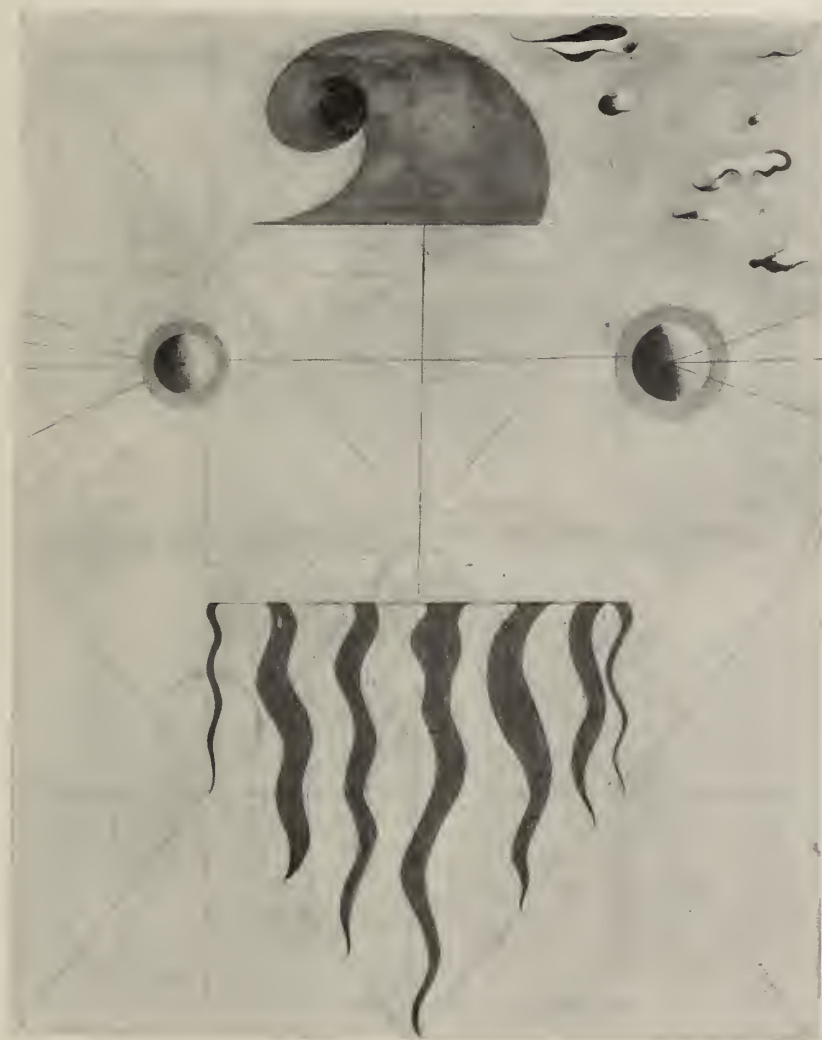
PROVENANCE:

The artist

Galerie Pierre, Paris

René Gaffé, Brussels

To present owner, 1957



During the year 1925, Miró executed four variations on this theme. The first version is detailed and descriptive, much in the enumerative spirit of *The Harlequin's Carnival*, 1924–25. In the final version (cat. no. 9), the theme is barely recognizable, due to the shift of emphasis from the figure as a figure to the space as a certain concept and expression of space.¹

This is either the second or the third version, where only the essential attributes of the peasant are retained: the *baretina*, or peasant cap, the peasant's eyes (radiating lines of vision), and his beard. The diagrammatic articulation of the figure shows the stage to which the stick figure in *The Hunter* (cat. no. 2) has progressed.

The stylization and heraldic symmetry of the image endow it with an emblematic character. The presence of the Rousseau-like clouds (as in *The Tilled Field*, cat. no. 1) destroy this reading however and indicate that this is not a static emblem on a field but an animated figure floating in the sky.

Similar to several other paintings of this period (e. g. *Figure*, 1925, D. 106, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris), Miró has organized the painting according to a grid structure. This was in order to loosen the syntax of a traditional figure/ground relationship with its implications of perspective and gravity. The fact that the left eye is smaller than the right effects an imperceptible recession in space which can be read as a visual pun.

¹ See pp. 18 ff., this catalogue.

9 *Head of a Catalan Peasant* 1925

Tête de paysan catalan

Oil on canvas, 57 1/2 x 44 7/8" (146 x 114 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1925.

Collection Gerard Bonnier, Stockholm

Dupin no. 111

PROVENANCE:

Marcel Mabille, Brussels

To present owner



The major figurative elements are the peasant's cap and a shooting star. The former was a sign of Miró's Catalan roots. The latter, an image which Miró refers to in a text he wrote in the late 1930s recalling his thinking at this period: "... falling stars crossing the blue space to pin themselves on the body of my brunette who dives into the phosphorescent Ocean after describing a luminous circle."¹ The origin of this star in Miró's work is probably related to Miró's introduction to the art of Paul Klee. It is difficult to discover which of Klee's paintings Miró knew, but he claims that his first glimpse of Klee was in a book of reproductions which André Masson showed him in 1924. The star depicted as a graphic sign is a recurrent image in that period of Klee's art to which Miró was first introduced (e. g. *Under a Black Star*, 1918, *The Magic Night*, 1919). The star first appears in a work by Miró in 1924 (*The Hermitage*, D. 92 and "*Sourire de ma blonde*," cat. no. 5). Several other works from 1925 carry this motif (e. g. "*Etoiles en des sexes d'escargot*," cat. no. 11 and *Painting D*, 156).

Klee had his first one-man show in Paris in the late fall of 1925.² For the catalogue of this exhibition Eluard wrote a poem in response to Klee's art:

*Sur la pente fatale, le voyageur profite
De la faveur du jour, verglas et sans cailloux
Et les yeux bleus d'amour, découvrent sa saison
Qui porte à tous les doigts de grands astres en bague.*

*Sur la plage la mer a laissé ses oreilles
Et la sable creusé la place d'un beau crime
Le supplice est plus dur aux bourreaux qu'aux victimes,
Les couteaux sont des signes et les balles des larmes.³*

*On the fatal slope, the traveler profits
From the favor of daylight, for it is icy and without
[gravel
And, his eyes blue with love, he discovers that season
Which wears rings set with stars on all its fingers.*

*The sea has deposited its ears on the beach
And the hollowed sand is the place of a beautiful crime
The punishment is harder for the hangmen than for the
[victims.
The knives are signs and the bullets are tears.*

This version of *Head of a Catalan Peasant* is the last in the series of four (see cat. no. 8). For a discussion of its formal structure, see pp. 18–20 above.

¹ "*Etoiles filantes qui traversent l'espace bleu pour aller s'épingler sur le corps de ma brune qui plonge dans l'Océan phosphorescent en décrivant un cercle lumineux.*" Joan Miró, *Terre*, no. 4, 1959, p. 85.

² At the Galerie Vavin Raspail.

³ Reprinted in Will. Grohmann, *Paul Klee*, Editions Cahiers d'Art, Paris, 1929, p. 24.

10 *Head of a Smoker* 1925

Tête de fumeur

Oil on canvas, 25⁵/₈ × 31⁷/₈" (65 × 81 cm.)

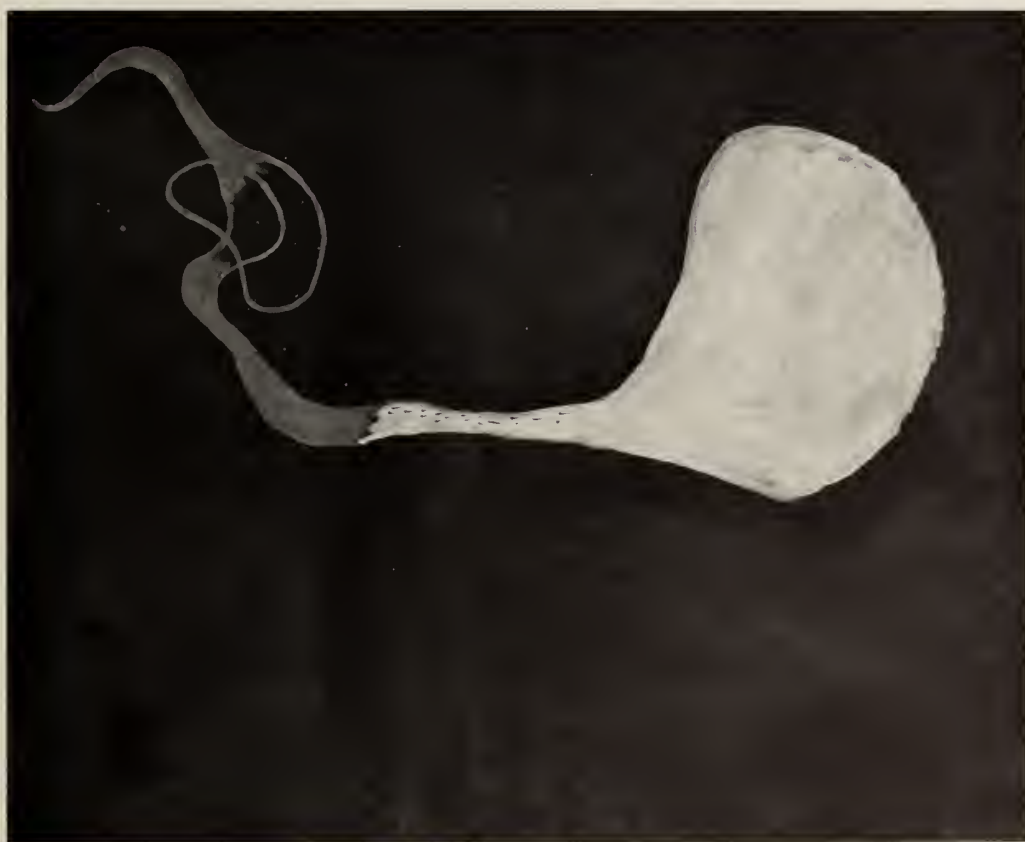
Signed and dated lower left: Miró. // 1925.

Private Collection

PROVENANCE:

Collection Dutilleul, Paris

To present owner



The theme of the pipe smoker is frequent throughout the early part of Miró's œuvre. The motif of the pipe is found in his earliest portraits and still-lives of 1917-18. A man smoking a pipe is prevalent starting in 1923-24 with the depiction of the hunter in the work of the same name, and recurring in *The Family*, 1924 and *The Harlequin's Carnival*, 1924-25. In the last two paintings, the pipe identifies the male figure, and thereby serves as an essential masculine attribute. Cirici-Pellicer has suggested that the identification of a pipe with masculinity stems from a Spanish tradition.¹

In schematic drawings of 1924, a smoking pipe is often visually "rhymed" with a phallus of the same shape (see fig. 50), reconfirming that the act of smoking is identified with masculinity. This interpretation does not obviate another reading of smoke as the stuff of dreams and hallucinations.

The image of the smoking man is not without precedent. Often found in Cubist portraits, he was rendered in calligrammatic form by Guillaume Apollinaire in a poem called "Fumées" or "Smoke" (see fig. 28). In this *calligramme* the accent has been displaced from the man to smoke itself, and its ethereal poetic quality.

By 1924, Miró will have developed the theme to its most abstract expression in another painting called *Head of a Smoker* (D. 96), where, like here, all that remains is the smoke of the pipe.

These considerations provide a key to the reading of this painting, which, although called *Head of a Smoker*, is obviously just "smoke." In view of its decidedly phallic billowing form, all the above connotations are contained in the image.

¹ A. Cirici-Pellicer, *Miró en su obra*, Barcelona, 1970.

The author remarks that a man's rest-room in Spain is often identified by a pipe-smoking head.

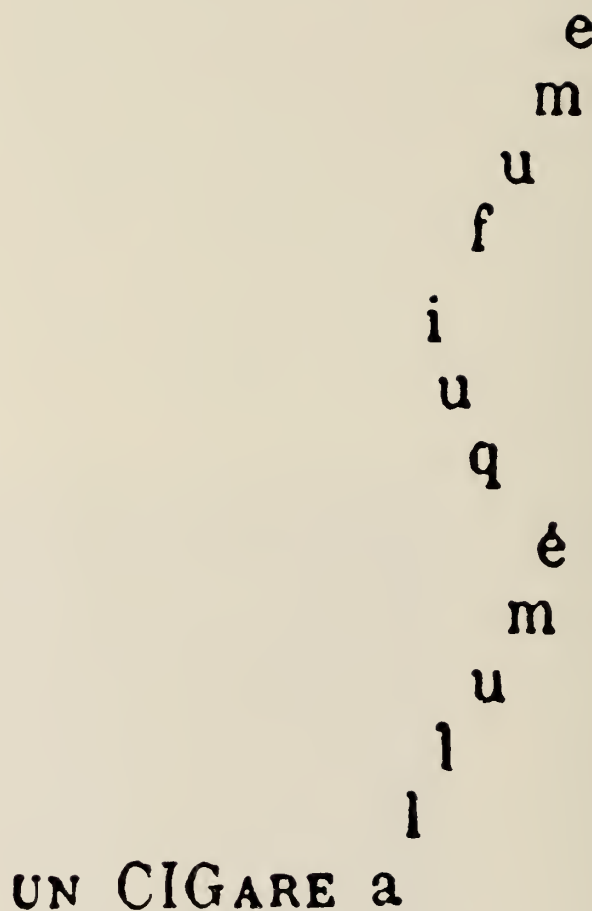


Fig. 28. Guillaume Apollinaire, *Paysage*, 1914. Detail



Fig. 30. Joan Miró. *Composition*, 1924. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection

11 "Étoiles en des sexes d'escargot" 1925

Oil on canvas, 51¹/₈ × 58¹/₈" (129.5 × 97 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1925.

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

Dupin no. 108

The *escargot* or snail is one of Miró's constant motifs. Obviously part of his familiar landscape at Montroig, it was to be assimilated into his emotional landscape and his poetic repertory. It is found in paintings as early as a still life, *Bottle and Snail*, of 1916, and reappears in *The Farm*, 1921–22, *The Tilled Field*, 1925–24, *Snail*, *Woman*, *Flower*, *Star*, 1934, *Personages in the Night Guided by the Phosphorescent Tracks of Snails*, 1940.

The association between stars and snails is understandable in the sense that both, for Miró, are essentially spiral configurations. The artist frequently depicts stars leaving a spiraling trail of sparks (see cat. no. 28). The juxtaposition of the two motifs—the astral and the elementary—as well as their use in an alliterative context is found in other literature of the period. An example of this is seen in a poem by Tristan Tzara which was published in April 1918 in the French magazine *SIC*.¹

*Flon lampes une queue une lumière blanche
très blanche fuir soleil et étoiles escargot
ou poissons volants dans la gare un pied humain
salle d'attente des pots différents en terre cuite deux
[couteaux*

*Flon lamps a tail a white light
very white to flee sun and stars snail
or flying fish in the station a human foot
waiting-room for different pots in terra cotta two knives*

The imagery in Tzara's poem is strikingly close to the spirit of Miró's imagery in 1925–27. It is perhaps due to poetic affinities that Tzara was one of the first poets Miró met in Paris during his first winter there—the winter of 1919–20. They were to become great friends and, slightly later, Miró executed his first lithographs for a collection of Tzara's poetry *L'Arbre des voyageurs*, published in 1950. For a more extensive analysis of this particular painting see pp. 57–58.

¹ No page number. Miró was still living in Barcelona at this time; however, since *SIC* published poetry by many of his Spanish friends (J. Pérez-Jorba, J.V. Foix), and since Dupin reports that Miró started reading the avant-garde magazines prior to that time, we can be fairly certain that he was reading *SIC*.

PROVENANCE:

Galerie Beaune, Paris

Walter P. Chrysler, Jr.

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

To present owner



12 "Oh! un de ces messieurs qui a fait tout ça"
1925

Oil on canvas, 51¹/₈ × 57³/₈" (130 × 95 cm.)
Signed and dated lower left: Miró. // 1925.
Galerie Maeght, Paris
Dupin no. 109

PROVENANCE:

Private collection
To present owner

In conversation with the authors, Miró described as "automatic" the rapid, random marks set down in response to configurations he might see on the page of a notebook or on a letter he received. Reacting to aspects of these things which strike him: "*ce qui me frappe, t-zack!*", he will transfer the visual excitation to the surface of a drawing or painting. The linear elements in "*Oh! un de ces messieurs...*" were arrived at in this way.



13 *The Siesta* 1925

La Sieste

Oil on canvas, $44\frac{3}{4} \times 57\frac{1}{2}$ " (113.6 x 146 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1925.

Private Collection

Dupin no. 119

The Siesta is probably one of the earliest of the paintings on blue grounds of 1925. Beginning from a naturalistic drawing of the scene, Miró transformed its elements into weightless, disembodied forms. As in *The Hunter* (cat. no. 2) the dotted line is used to designate the placement of the body in space without actually rendering its mass. As is also the case in the earlier work, Miró uses lettering as a prominent visual element. Miró has identified the numeral "12" as signifying the time of day for sleep on the beach. This particular use of numerals also appears in the earlier *Pastoral*, where it is specifically connected with a sundial (see cat. no. 5). Jacques Dupin supplies the following information about this painting:

PROVENANCE:

The artist

Galerie Pierre, Paris

Mme. Marie Cuttoli, Paris

Galerie Beyeler, Basel

To present owner

The Siesta was originally a very detailed descriptive composition, a scene involving two persons on a beach. The slumbering character of this picture—which provides the title—is now conveyed by an unidentifiable dreamy white form; the female swimmer has become a pure ideogram, while the dented blue form hardly suggests that it formerly represented the line of mountains closing in the horizon around Montroig.¹

For a discussion of the formal role of the white form, see pages 37–38 above.

¹ Dupin, *op. cit.*, p. 162.



14 "Photo: Ceci est la couleur de mes rêves" 1925

Oil on canvas, 58 x 51" (96.5 x 129.5 cm.)
Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1925.
Private Collection
Dupin no. 125

PROVENANCE:

The artist
Max Ernst
Meret Oppenheim
James Johnson Sweeney, New York
To present owner



Fig. 31. Pierre Reverdy, "Compagnon" and "Portrait".

Roland Penrose has suggested that Miró's interest in the appearance of words and their magical powers stems from a long Catalan tradition.¹ Catalan peasants decorate their carts with arabesques, and write their name and sometimes inscriptions on them with a flourish. Therefore Catalans attach great importance to the way words and lettering look, and this importance is found throughout Miró's work, not only in his inscriptions but in his signature.

This *tableau-poème* is one of the simplest in imagery and most evocative in meaning that Miró was to do. It is unique in that the primary sensuous experience is in the graphic inscription. However, as we have noted elsewhere (see pp. 60-61) the prime source of poetic meaning is in the organization of the painting and the inevitable associations of the spot of blue.

The disposition of the word "Photo" on the canvas, in its visual and semantic relationship to the rest of the painting, corresponds to a title-to-poem relationship typical of much poetry of the period (see fig. 51). The relationship of the title to the verse was usually ambiguous as it is here.

¹ Roland Penrose, "Introduction," *Joan Miró*, Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1964, p. 7, and in conversation with the authors.

Photo



*ceci est la couleur
de mes rêves.*

15 "*Le corps de ma brune...*" 1925

Oil on canvas, 51 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 37 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (130 x 96 cm.)
Signet and dated lower right: Miró, 1925.
Hermanos Collection
Dupin no. 126

PROVENANCE:

The artist
Galerie Pierre, Paris
Mme. Marie Cuttoli, Paris
Cordier Warren Gallery, New York
To present owner, 1960
The work is extensively discussed on pp. 50-54



16 *Painting (The Check)* 1925
Peinture (L'Addition)

Oil on canvas, 76³/₄ × 51¹/₈" (195 × 130 cm.)
Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1925.
Private Collection
Dupin no. 128

PROVENANCE:

The artist
Galerie Pierre, Paris
René Gaffé, Brussels
Mrs. René Gaffé
To present owner

Inspired by Alfred Jarry's play *Le Surmâle*, this painting shows definite literary inspiration. Another painting of the same year which seems to draw on the same literary source is *Painting*, 1925 (not in Dupin; reproduced in Jacques Lassaigue, *Miró*, Skira, 1965, p. 44) in which the distinctive feature of the single figure is an enormous phallus. For an extensive discussion of the literary sources, see pp. 43–45.



17 *Painting (Personage)* 1925

Peinture (Personnage)

Oil and tempera on canvas, 51 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 58" (129.7 x 96.5 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1925.

Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York

Dupin no. 159

PROVENANCE:

The artist

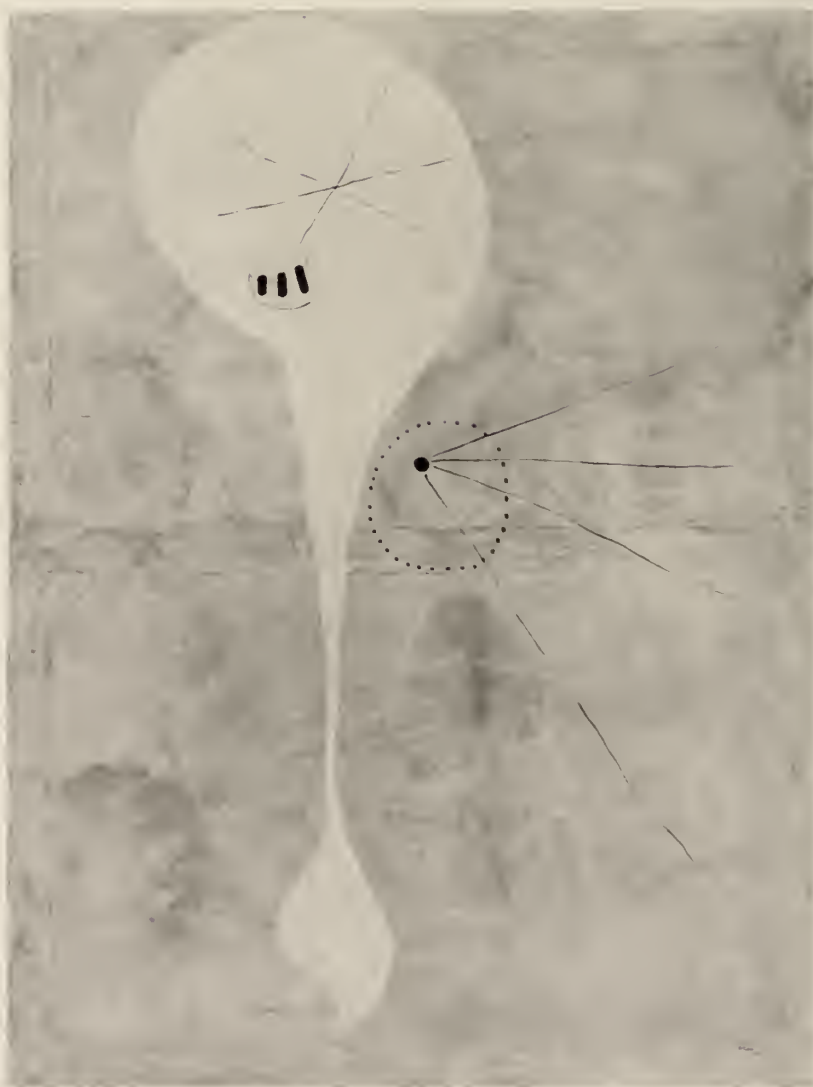
Galerie Pierre, Paris

Karl Nierendorf, New York

Estate of Karl Nierendorf, 1948

To present owner, 1948

During the winter of 1925, Miró created a number of paintings of this kind, identifiable by the presence of a floating white figure on a blue or brown ground. Jacques Dupin has described these personages in the following passage:



... it is only rarely in these works that a descriptive approach to reality served as a point of departure ... It often happens that a figure (or "personage") emerges from the progression of his line, from the effusion of spots, ... Miró created many of these "personages" but they are always the same uncertain, ghostly white, with a fluctuating, sinuous contour; the only parts insistently developed are the head, the foot, the genitals, or the eye. These "personages" are devoid of all materiality, all corporeal density. Because of their spectral appearance, they seem to be figures yet unborn, still not given life. They ignore the laws of gravitation; they hover in the clouds or glide through liquid or viscous matter. They are the very substance of dreams and hallucinations.¹

In spite of these explanations, Miró's imagery remains enigmatic. Even when the symbols are recognizable, they are often endowed with double meaning. The form is obviously meant to be an anthropomorphic figure, with an outsized head with teeth, and a large foot. The star-shaped sign on the head is usually a sign for the female genitals; here displaced to the head, it could be that, or an eye. The dotted circle around a spot with radiating spokes also has two readings in keeping with Miró's private sign language: the male genitals or an eye projecting lines of vision. These unresolved ambiguities hold the viewer in a state of conceptual suspension. In keeping with the Surrealist propensity for double meanings, there is no "correct" reading.

¹ Jacques Dupin, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-64.

18 *Painting* 1925

Peinture

Oil on canvas, $24\frac{3}{8} \times 35\frac{7}{8}$ " (61 x 91 cm.)

Signed lower right: Miró

Galerie Maeght, Paris

Dupin no. 149

Within the blue field of this painting there appear only two elements: a horizon line along its center, and in the upper corner a star. Speaking of his teacher in Barcelona, Miró said:

I remember two paintings of Urgell in particular, both characterized by long, straight, twilight horizons which cut the pictures in halves: one a painting of a moon above a cypress tree, another with a crescent moon low in the sky. Three forms which have become obsessions with me represent the imprint of Urgell: a red circle, the moon, and a star. They keep coming back, each time slightly different.¹

In discussing Miró's tendency to structure his work of the mid-1920's with the two-part separation caused by the horizon line, Jacques Dupin writes:

To Miró, the horizon is a magical rather than a symbolic sign, indicating presence in the world but also reminding that the external world serves as an arbiter between the subjective powers and their expression. It separates, but even more it unites—it holds earth and sky, the real and the imaginary together. For all that, the horizon is ideal, being visible without being traced, and as it appears is no more than a boundary between zones of contrasting colors: those of earth and sky.²

The use of contrasting colors occurs in paintings preceding this one (like *The Hunter* where sea and sky contrast with the ground) and in somewhat later work (the landscapes of 1927). In this painting the unification of the visual world is effected by a single field of color which simultaneously addresses itself to the unity of the pictorial world. The reticence with which Miró states the horizon line here speaks to this need for a unity which nothing must interrupt.

¹ James Johnson Sweeney, "Joan Miró," *Partisan Review*, vol. XV, no. 2, February 1948, p. 209.

² Jacques Dupin, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

PROVENANCE:

Private collection

To present owner



19 *Painting* 1925

Peinture (Au Cirque)

Oil on canvas, 45⁵/₈ × 35" (115.9 × 89 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1925.

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin, New York

Dupin no. 151

PROVENANCE:

Valentine Gallery, New York

To present owner, February 13, 1945

This painting on a circus theme can be related to others of 1925–27 such as the works known as *The Fratellini* (referring to a famous trio of clowns) and the *Circus Horse* series. One of the Surrealists' preferred entertainments was the *Cirque Médrano* at the foot of Montmartre. This apparently supplied the source of inspiration for a number of Miró's paintings.

According to the present owners—on the basis of discussions with Miró—the painting depicts a French clown, traditionally garbed in a blue apron and white gloves, and carrying a green umbrella. He is juggling a plate on a stick on his lip. The multicolored sparks are fireworks.



20 *Painting* (Project for a stage curtain for
Roméo et Juliette) 1925
Peinture

PROVENANCE:

Serge Lifar

To present owner, 1955

Oil on canvas, $50\frac{3}{8} \times 37\frac{1}{4}$ " (128 x 94.6 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1925.

Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, The Ella
Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection

Dupin no. 155



21 "Sable" 1925

Tempera on canvas, $51\frac{7}{8} \times 59\frac{3}{8}$ " (81 x 100 cm.)
Signed and dated lower left: Miró. // 1925.
Collection Pierre Bruguère, Paris
Dupin no. 155

PROVENANCE:

The artist
Galerie Pierre, Paris
To present owner, 1938

The first poem in Eluard's collection *Répétitions*, 1922, is titled "L'Invention." The image of sand occurs in this poem to signify the passage of time—an association used frequently by Surrealist poets. As well, Eluard specifically links his image of sand to the four natural elements, and thus to the landscape. Because "Sable" also seems to symbolize the four elements (see p. 31 above)¹ within a shifting ground, which itself essentializes the idea of transformations, painting and poem are enlightening when seen together.

See cat. no. 24, for another example.

¹ It is interesting to note in this connection that Masson whose studio was next to Miró's at 45, rue Blomet, painted a work called *Les Quatre éléments* in 1924, the time of his closest friendship with Miró.

L'Invention

*La droite laisse couler du sable.
Toutes les transformations sont possibles.
Loin, le soleil aiguise sur les pierres sa hâte d'en finir.
La description du paysage importe peu,
Tout juste l'agréable durée des moissons.
Clair avec mes deux yeux,
Comme l'eau et le feu. . . .*

The Invention

*The right hand lets the sand run through.
All transformations are possible.
Far off, the sun sharpens on the stones its haste to come to an end.
The description of the landscape is of little importance,
The agreeable harvest season scarcely enough.
Light with my two eyes,
Like water and fire. . . .*



22 *Circus Horse* 1925

Le Cheval de cirque

Oil on canvas, 28³/₄ x 55⁷/₈" (75 x 91.1 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. 1925.

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Roy J. Friedman, Chicago

Dupin no. 205

PROVENANCE:

Private collection, Brussels

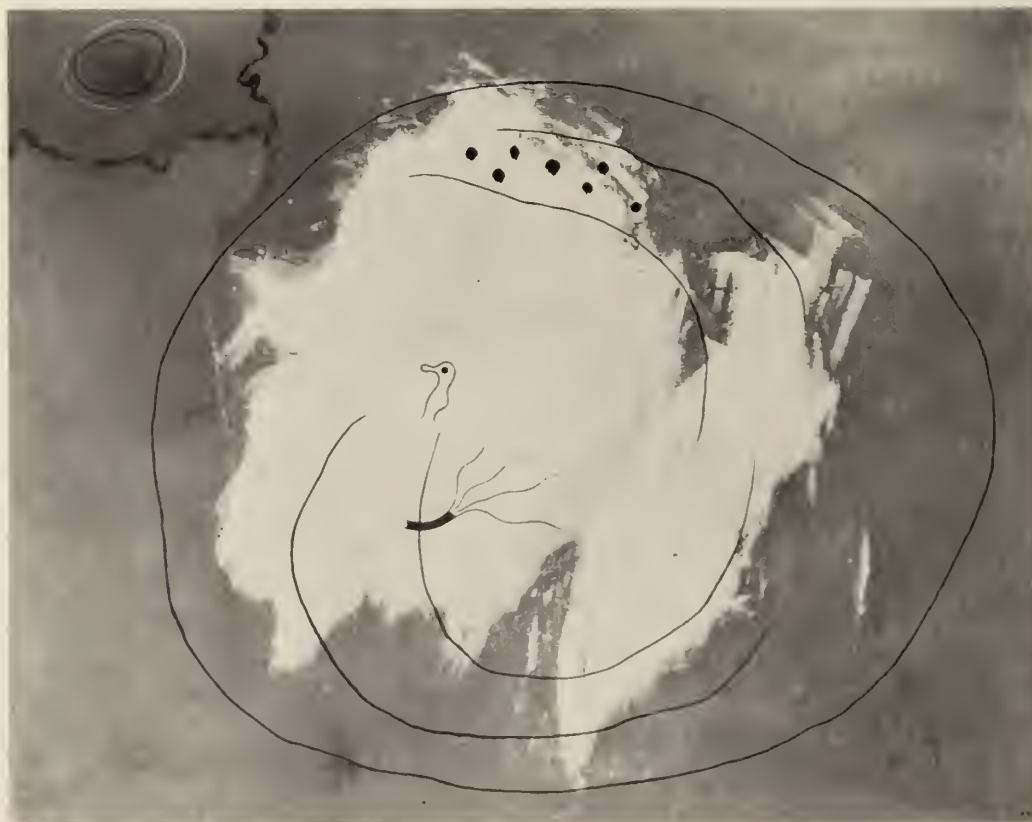
Curt Valentin Gallery, New York

To present owner, May 26, 1952

Some of Miró's work associated with the theme of the circus seems close to models in real life. *Personage* (D. 190), for instance, has the bulbous nose and elaborate plate-shaped eyes characteristic of the outlandish makeup of Paul Fratellini, one of the three Fratellini brothers who were the *Cirque Médrano's* most famous clowns.¹

¹ See Legrand Chabrier, "Clowns," *L'Art vivant*, June 1925, pp. 16-18.

Other pictures like this *Circus Horse* are more remote, implying a spiraling recession into space blocked by the patch of white ground. The shape of the ring seems to be given by this spiral, along with details that simultaneously suggest the ring-master's whip. The spiraling movement through space, with is suggested by several of the circus horse paintings which Miró did at this time, may as well refer to the path of the horse running around the ring, circling the trainer who stands in the center.



23 *Painting* 1926

Peinture (Les Champs-Élysées)

Oil on canvas, 25⁵/₈ × 51⁷/₈" (65 × 81 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1926.

Private Collection

PROVENANCE:

Collection Dutilleul, Paris

To present owner

The apocryphal title of this painting alludes to children buying balloons on the Champs-Élysées and taking them to play in the Tuileries. Therefore, one reading of the motifs is a red kite and a white balloon floating in the sky, and the green of the Tuileries gardens in the distance below.

However, in 1926, it is difficult to imagine Miró depicting such a simple subject. Furthermore, balloons were endowed with metaphorical overtones during this period, in relation to a crucial term of reference for the Surre-



24 *Landscape (The Grasshopper)* 1926
Paysage (La Sauterelle)

Oil on canvas, 44⁷/₈ × 57¹/₂" (114 × 146 cm.)
Signed lower half of canvas: Joan Miró; dated lower
left: 1926
Collection P. Janlet, Brussels
Dupin no. 176

alist movement: Guillaume Apollinaire's *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, first produced in Paris on June 24, 1917.¹

In the play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, the heroine Thérèse decides to divest herself of her feminine “charms” in order to lead a man’s life. Opening her blouse, she releases two balloons: one blue, one red, attached to her torso by strings. She jiggles them and “makes them dance”² and finally cuts them from herself, to take on the male identity of Tirésias.

Proof that Thérèse's "charms" were readily associated to children's balloons is provided by the following passage from a poem by Pierre Albert-Birot published in *SIC* in April 1918:³

*Je suis allé promener mes pensées
Aux Champs-Élysées
Où les enfants achetaient pour
cinq sous
Les ballons verts les ballons bleus
Thérésiarques mamelles
Et j'ai regardé Guignol*

*I went to walk my thoughts
On the Champs-Élysées
Where for five centimes children
 were buying
Green balloons, blue balloons
Thérèse-like breasts
And I watched the puppet-show*

Beginning in *The Tilled Field* and continuing in *Head of a Catalan Peasant*, Miró worked with a landscape space explicitly divided into four strongly indicated quadrants. This division occurs again here: the north-to-south axis indicated by the flagpole and the edge of the patch of sea; the east-to-west axis given by the horizon line. Each of the quadrants has a very particular character. The lower right is the site of Miró's signature which rhymes with the mountainous terrain of the earth (particularly the "M"). The upper right carries the suspended white form of the "grasshopper" (whose body terminates in an enormous foot) and the unfurled flags. In the upper left is an erotically charged image: a volcanic sun with flames erupting from it, on which there appears the ladder frequently associated in these landscapes with movement into distance. The lower left is primarily the region of the sea. As was the case with "*Sable*" these quadrants each contain a particular mode of description (some symbolic, some ideogrammatic, some more depictive), and each is associated with one of the four elements, earth, air, fire and water (see cat. no. 21).

¹ It was in the preface of *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* that the term "surréalisme" was first seen in print.

² Guillaume Apollinaire, *L'Enchanteur pourrissant*, suivi de *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*..., Gallimard, Paris, 1972, p. 121.

³ *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* was first announced and summarized in the June 1917 issue of *SIC*, n. p.

PROVENANCE:

Galerie Surréaliste, Paris

Galerie "Le Centaure," Brussels

To present owner, 1932



25 "Un oiseau poursuit une abeille et la baisse"

1927

Oil on canvas, 51 7/8 x 39 3/8" (81 x 100 cm.)

Signed and dated center right: Miró. // 1927.

Private Collection, New York

Dupin no. 161

PROVENANCE:

Alberto Magnelli, Paris

Mme. M. Pasquier, Paris

To present owner

As we have seen (pp. 58-59) "Un oiseau . . ." is Miró's most calligrammatic *tableau poème* of the twenties. One of Apollinaire's own *calligrammes* may have been in Miró's mind when he executed this painting: "télégraphe/ oiseau qui laisse tomber ses ailes partout" (see fig. 29), organized visually as the image of a bird in flight. The phonetic and visual similarity of Apollinaire's "laisse" to Miró's "baisse" may be significant in having inspired Miró to do a calligrammatic painting on this subject.

There are further frames of reference in which this painting may be considered. At first glance, the central visual motif around the word "poursuit" evokes Arp's string paintings begun as early as 1925-24 (e.g. *Dancer*, 1925-24, string and oil on canvas). On closer examination, one realizes that in Miró's painting the motif consists of a flow of oil paint applied directly from the tube. Nonetheless, in spite of a different medium, the mode of composition and the visual effect are comparable to those works by Arp.

Although it is hard to determine exactly when Miró and Arp first met, Arp was frequently in Paris after 1914. As an active member of the Dada movement, Arp participated in the International Dada Exhibition in Paris in 1922. He also exhibited in the first Surrealist exhibition at the Galerie Pierre, Paris, in 1925, in which Miró was a participant as well.

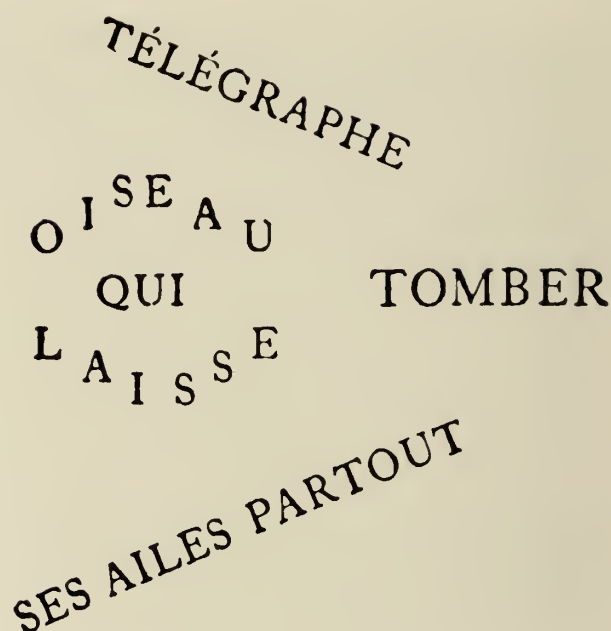
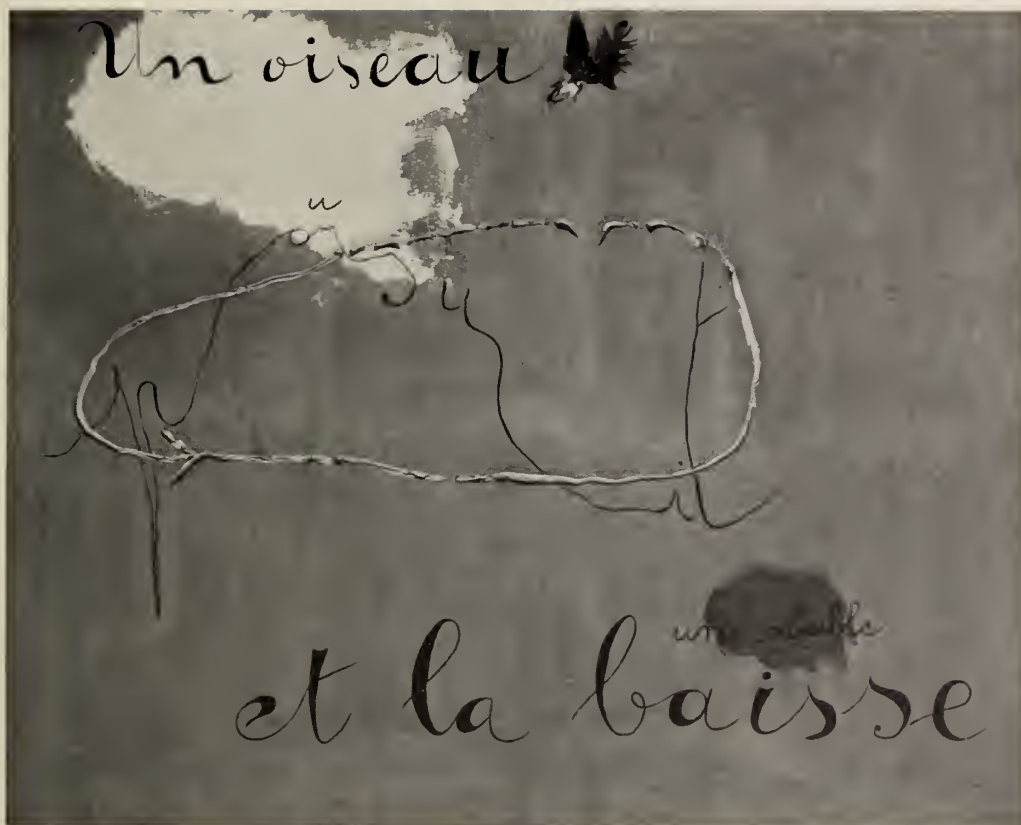


Fig. 29. Guillaume Apollinaire. *Joyage*. Detail



26 *Landscape* 1927

Paysage

Oil on canvas, 51 1/8 x 76 3/4" (150 x 194.9 cm.)

Signed and dated lower left: Miró // 1927.

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Bunshaft, New York

Dupin no. 180



Fig. 33. Joan Miró. *Spider and Beetle*. October 23, 1924.
Collection Walter Bareiss

PROVENANCE:

Pierre Colle, Paris

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

To present owner, November 1, 1958

Although this painting is sometimes referred to as *Landscape with Rabbit and Flower*, Miró himself has identified the white form on the stem as an egg.¹ A similar egg-shaped form appears on a stem in the 1924 drawing *Woman and Insects* (fig. 33). In this drawing a halo of dots surrounds the egg form, which serves as the head of the female. From this head arc five lines. The stem is crossed by a horizontal line with a flower and a leaf at either end. Lower down on the stem six radiating lines form a spider web. In this context, the leaf and flower double as the woman's breasts and the web as her genitals—a variation on the more common association in Miró's art of the female genitals as a spider (see cat. no. 2). The head/flower/egg appears in many different variations in these years (see cat. no. 33). In this painting, what is prominent is the extreme simplification of it to a modeled oval on a single stem. In discussing the Catalan Romanesque mural sources for Miró's development in the early 1920s, R. T. Doepel cites the "flowering rod" motif where the Tree of Life is simplified to a circle on a shaft (fig. 25).² The connection between the egg form and the notion of a life-source appears elsewhere in the years 1924–25. In *The Hunter* (cat. no. 2), for instance, the figure of the hunter is formed by a crossed-axis like the flowering plant in the drawing. Similarly one finds in both figures the modeled egg shape with curved lines sprouting from its side. In this figure, however, the form is clearly the genitals of the hunter. The identification of the egg form with reproductive organs occurs again in *The Hunter*: in the lower region of the fish in the picture's foreground. From both Miró's testimony and from evidence internal to his work, one can see that to identify the right-hand image in this *Landscape* simply as a flower is to strip it of much of its meaning. For a discussion of the formal aspects of the painting see p. 57.

¹ In conversation with the authors. He also said that the animal was drawn as simply the head of a rabbit.

² R. T. Doepel, *Aspects of Joan Miró's Stylistic Development, 1920–1925*, Courtauld Institute, University of London, 1967. Unpublished M. A. thesis.



27 *Landscape (The Hare)* 1927

Paysage

Oil on canvas, 51 1/4 x 76 3/4" (130 x 195 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1927.

Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York

Dupin no. 18†

PROVENANCE:

The artist

Galerie Pierre, Paris

Galerie Maeght, Paris

To present owner. 1957

Jacques Dupin describes this painting as consisting of "nothing but a single odd creature, meticulously painted in several colors, apparently fascinated by the spiral path of a comet. All the rest is sky or earth, the purplish red of the latter and the orange of the former presenting an especially intense contrast."¹ The formal relationships in this work—between the color planes of the ground, and the effect of the white shape on that ground—are similar to those of *Landscape* (cat. no. 26) discussed on page 37 above. As well, the two works probably share a similar kind of content: a strange isolated animal transfixed by an apparition of female sexuality. For just as the second element in cat. no. 26 summarizes fecundity in one stark image before which the animal bows, the spiral form in *Landscape (The Hare)* may well be a representation of the dazzle of evanescent fantasy.

In a painting of 1925 which Miró himself titled *Lady Strolling on the Ramblas in Barcelona* (D. 148), one sees one of the most straightforwardly eroticized of Miró's images of women. Above the sensuous body, the head erupts as a dotted spiral—very like the spiral in this *Landscape*. Although there are many spirals in Miró's work at this time, no two so closely resemble one another as these. Because *Landscape* (cat. no. 26) and this *Landscape* compositionally seem to be almost pendants for one another, one wonders if they are not thematically paired as well.

¹ Dupin, *op. cit.*, p. 178.



28 "Musique, Seine, Michel, Bataille et moi"
1927

Oil on canvas, 51 7/8 x 39 3/8" (81 x 100 cm.)
Signed and dated lower left: Miró, // 1927.
Kunstmuseum, Winterthur,
Switzerland, Volkart Foundation
Dupin no. 192

PROVINANCE:

Dr. Heinz Keller, Winterthur
To present owner



Miró described the pretext of this painting to Sir Roland Penrose as an evening walk with his friends Michel Leiris and Georges Bataille as they were returning along the Seine from a concert. Penrose goes on to say "It is an eloquent image of aural and visual emotions in which trees take the shape of spiral waves of music, an early experiment in the translation of music into plastic signs which in later years has become an extraordinary feature of Miró's language."¹ In the context of the "magnetic field" paintings, this work reads as an evocation of the

concept of "*la glace sans tain*" (see page 13 above). The painting holds three levels of depth within its ground: inside the painting, the watery depths of the darkened river; on the painting's surface, the glittering reflections of stars (which form spirals) and of the moon; and on this side of the surface, the consciousness of the speaker/writer applying the inscription to it. It is an inscription which states Miró's own being: Music, the Seine, Michel, Bataille and myself. Like the unsilvered mirror of *Les Champs magnétiques*, the work simultaneously opens onto a space beyond itself and declares the opacity of the medium—pointing to its surface through the act of writing.

¹ Roland Penrose, *Joan Miró*, The Arts Council of Great Britain, The Tate Gallery, London, 1964, p. 27.

29 "*Beaucoup de monde*" 1927

Oil and tempera on canvas, $51\frac{1}{4} \times 59\frac{3}{8}$ " (82×100 cm.)
Signed and dated lower left: Joan Miró. // 1927.
Collection Baron Urvater, Paris
Dupin no. 195

PROVENANCE:

The artist
Galerie Pierre, Paris
Edouard Loeb, Paris
Rasmussen Collection, Paris
To present owner

Idiomatically, "*beaucoup de monde*" means "lots of people." But as in most of the work of this period, there is a conspicuous absence of human presence in this painting, as indeed there is an absence of any physical object to block the flow of its space. Instead there is a sense of the vastness or plethora of open space: literally "*beaucoup de monde*," or "a lot of the world." This sense of space, given by the movement of the eye into the illusionistic depth of the painting, is generated by color and by

the significance of the signs the work contains. Miró, in conversation with the authors, has identified the stacked parallel lines at the top of the picture as a sign for clouds. The arrow with its flat blade resembles the blades on Majorcan windmills. Within the painting it seems to serve not only as a conventional sign for direction through space, but to operate visually as the horizon line that appears with such frequency throughout these works.



50 *Painting* 1927

Peinture

Oil, tempera, and pencil on canvas, 51 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 76 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
(150 x 195 cm.)

Signed and dated lower left: Miró, // 1927.

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Walter Bareiss

Dupin no. 196

PROVENANCE:

The artist

Galerie Pierre, Paris

Anonymous gallery, New York

To present owner



The treatment of the field, by relating color to white reserved shape to monochrome ground, is familiar from other work of 1927, like *Landscape* (cat. no. 26), *Landscape (The Hare)* (cat. no. 27), and *Circus Horse* (cat. no. 34). It becomes important once more in work from the 1960s like *The Lark's Wing...* (cat. no. 47) and *The Passage of the Migratory Bird* (fig. 21). For a discussion of this formal issue, see pp. 57–58 above.

31 *Painting* 1927
Peinture (Le Toréador)

Oil on canvas, 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 38 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (130 × 97 cm.)
Signed and dated lower center: Miró. // 1927.
Private Collection
Dupin no. 197

PROVENANCE:

Collection Dutilleul, Paris
To present owner



This painting is based on the crossed axial structure which occurs repeatedly in the work of 1925–27. “*Amour*” (fig. 17), “*Le corps de ma brune . . .*” (cat. no. 15) and *Head of a Catalan Peasant* (cat. no. 9) represent only a few of the many examples, in which Miró uses the crossed axes to represent the body and outstretched arms of a standing figure. Because of this, and because of the presence of a rectangle of black which overlaps the “arm” in *Painting*, this work has acquired the name *Le Toréador*—a reading which identifies the black shape as the figure’s cloak. However Miró has voiced strong objections to this title, feeling no doubt that it involves the

work in an interpretation which is too literal, congealing its free-floating elements into a static whole and implying physicality. Because of the capacity built into the crossed axial configuration for the arms to separate from the body of the figure and to read as the horizon line of a deep space (see pp. 18–20 above), this configuration works in a way that is formally quite complex. The presence of the black rectangle intensifies this complexity, for it becomes a kind of cast shadow of the rectangular picture format as a whole—appearing as a projection of the painting’s surface backward into the deep space of the work.

32 *Painting* 1927

Peinture

Oil on canvas, 38 1/8 x 51 1/8" (96.8 x 129.7 cm.)

Signed and dated in center: Miró. // 1927.

David Nahmad Collection, Milan

Dupin no. 198

PROVENANCE:

The artist

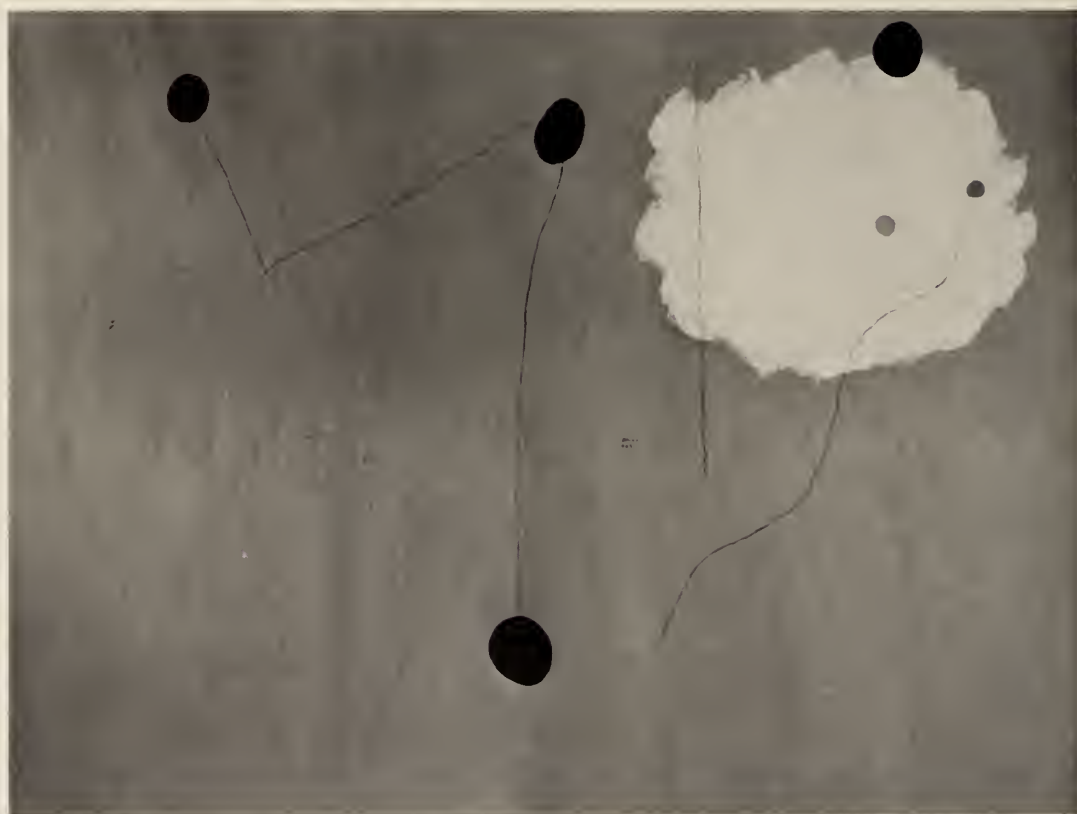
Galerie Pierre, Paris

René Gaffé, Brussels

Mrs. René Gaffé

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

To present owner, 1972



The device of black dots connected by fine lines to form a splayed "M" is related to *Landscape (The Grasshopper)* (cat. no. 24). There the distant mountains are volcanic with black dots representing their peaks. Below is the large "M" of Miró's signature echoing the shape of the mountain range. In *Painting*, a tension is set up between the flat, decorative quality of dots strung along the black lines and the implication of landscape and therefore of distance. This same configuration of bent line and dot, implying the same tension between surface and space, occurs in *Circus Horse* (cat. no. 34).

33 *Painting* 1927

Peinture

Oil on canvas, 38 1/4 x 51 1/4" (97 x 130 cm.)

Signed and dated lower left: Miró. // 1927.

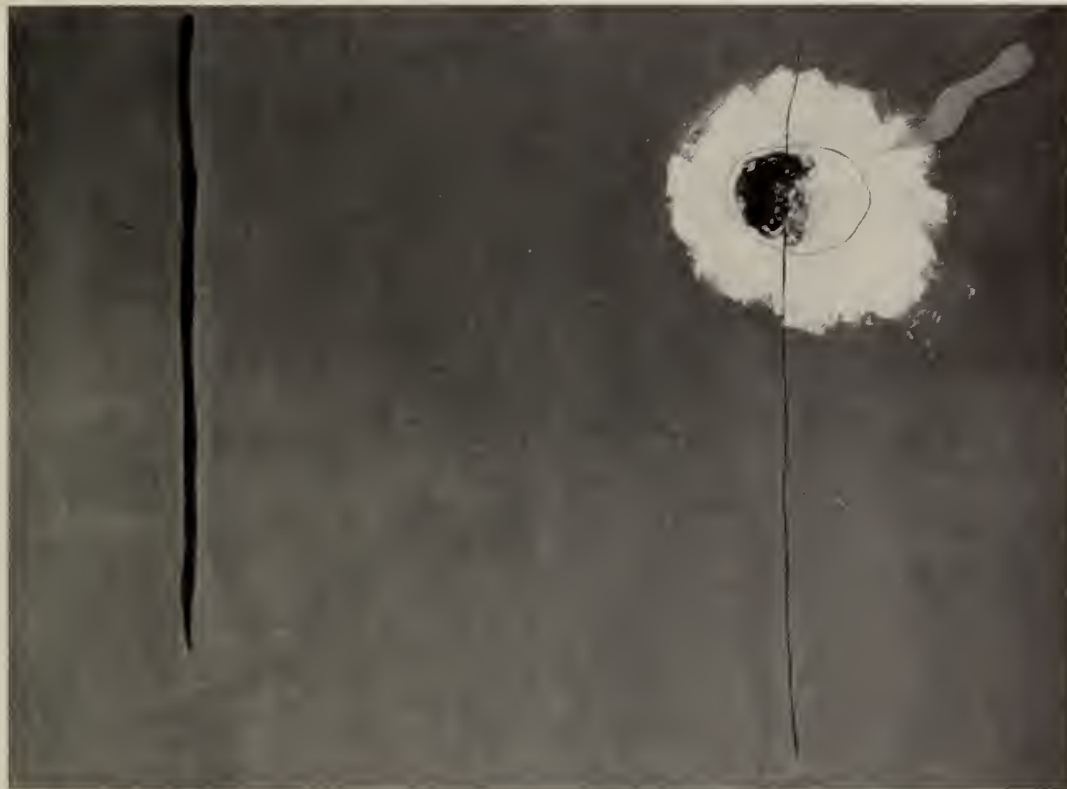
Private collection

Dupin no. 200

PROVENANCE:

Walter P. Chrysler, Jr.

To present owner



The raw canvas field of this painting implies the open space of the landscape, within which Miró has set a modeled circular form atop a vertical stem. In the context of the imagery of these years, this form with its white halo, is easily read as a doubling of flower and female figure. This egg-shaped flower occurs earlier in a 1924 drawing, *Woman and Insects* (fig. 33), where it is much more legible as the head of the female figure. In *The Trap* of 1924 (D. 95), a round head atop a stalk is again depicted as a flower, although the figure in *The Trap* is clearly masculine. Another 1924 drawing (fig. 30) repeats this situation of stalk supporting the figure's head, except that here the female head is elaborated into the delicate petals and stamen of the hibiscus. For the general significance of this motif, see cat. no. 26.

34 *Circus Horse* 1927

Le Cheval de cirque

Oil on canvas, 76 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 110 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (194.9 x 280 cm.)

Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1927.

The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

Dupin no. 206

In 1927 a miniature-scale circus became the fascination of the Montparnasse art world. It was the invention of Alexander Calder who performed it in his studio from 1927 to 1950. Whether or not the large number of circus pictures which Miró did in 1927 were painted under this new impetus, Calder's circus is certainly symptomatic of the intense delight the Surrealists took in the

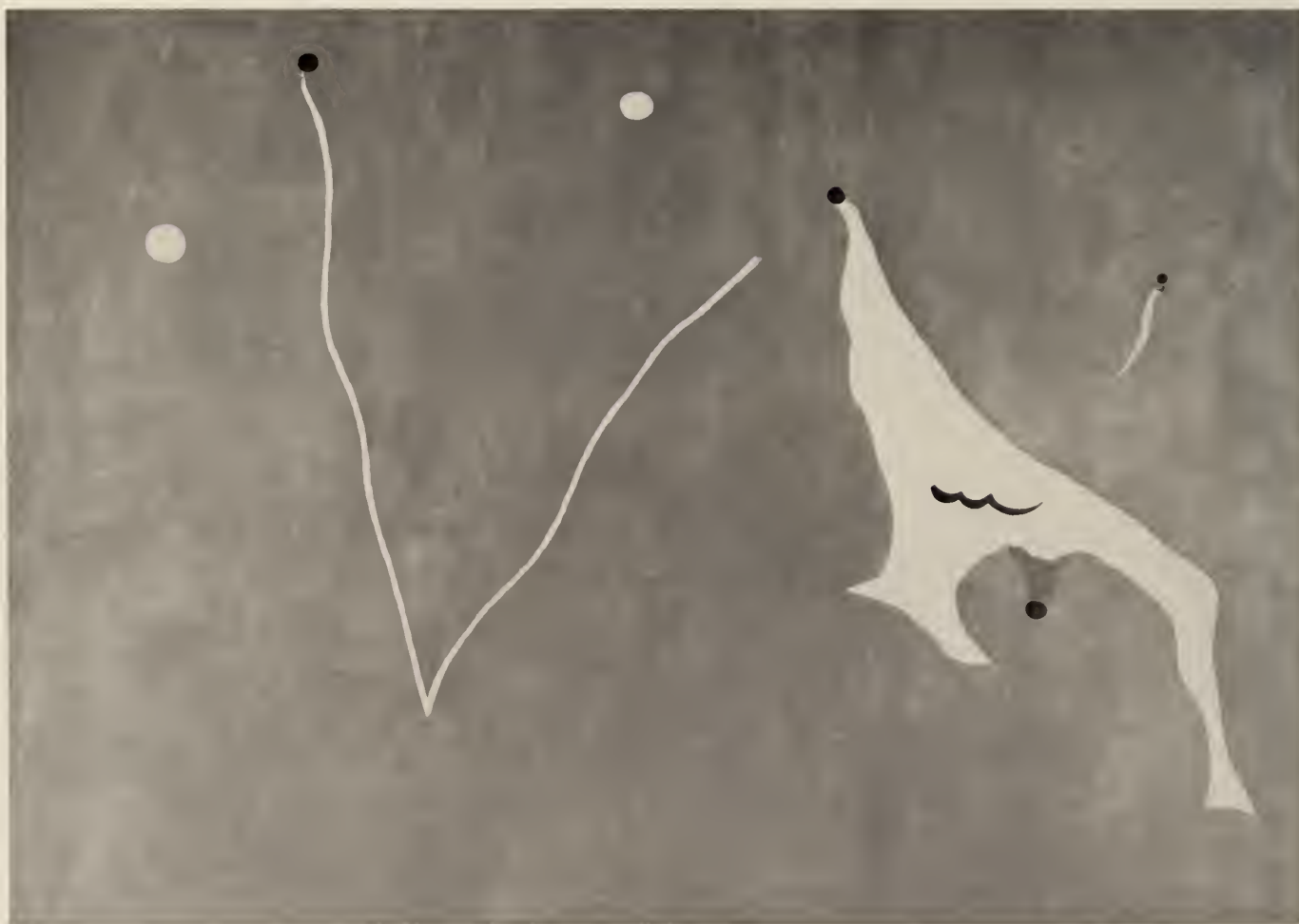
PROVENANCE:

Philippe Dotremont, Brussels

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

To present owner, 1968

circus. In this painting by Miró the absorption of the figure and the linear element next to it—both of them white—into the space of the field is characteristic of Miró's treatment of images within landscape in 1927 (see pp. 37–38). This treatment allowed Miró to expand the field to an unprecedented size.



35 "48" 1927

Oil on canvas, $57\frac{1}{2} \times 44\frac{7}{8}$ " (146 x 114 cm.)
Signed and dated lower right: Miró. // 1927.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Arthur A. Cohen, New York
Dupin no. 216

From 1922 to 1927, Miró's Paris studio was at 45, rue Blomet. The house across the street was number 48. As in other cases where Miró signified an object by painting the sparsest of its attributes, he has here designated the house by means of its symbol. The number "48" acts not only as a forceful graphic sign on a field, but is full of allusive meaning to the artist, evoking at once a real object and the emotional landscape of a definite period of his life.

PROVENANCE:

The artist
Galerie Pierre, Paris
Mme. Marie Cuttoli, Paris
Robert Elkon Gallery, New York
To present owner, 1968

In the upper right is the familiar (but always enigmatic) spider-female-genitals-sun symbol.

Miró's use of numbers in this painting is comparable to *The Siesta* (cat. no. 13) in which the figures have a metaphorical meaning. However, in late paintings such as the series *Letters and Numbers Attracted by a Spark* (cat. no. 55-57), letters and numbers are used differently: as a constellation of linguistic signs and phonetic sounds in space.



36 *Painting* 1930

Peinture

Oil on canvas, 59 x 88⁵/₈" (150 x 225 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: Joan Miró // 1930

Menil Family Collection

Dupin no. 263

It is often said that in 1928–29, Miró abandoned painting. This is not altogether true: there exist enough major paintings of the period to prove the contrary. However, he did return to a more concrete mode of expression in his paintings, at the same time becoming interested in constructions and collages.

Painting, 1930, as a unique example of a "magnetic field" painting from the year 1930, can only be explained through its relationship to the *papiers collés* of 1929, where round monochrome disks (of sandpaper or colored paper) animate a contrasting ground. Unlike the generally more violent expressive idiom Miró adopted in 1930, the serenity and cosmic dimension of this canvas is reminiscent in spirit of the paintings of the twenties.

PROVENANCE:

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York and

Pierre Loeb Gallery, Paris jointly

To present owner, 1952

As well, its formal structure anticipates paintings to emerge in the 1960's (see cat. no. 60). Like the work of the sixties, the shapes in this painting do not directly depict recognizable images. However it would be a mistake to see the work as an abstraction. Just as the titles of the sixties paintings tend to indicate the identity and milieu of the elements within them, so this picture should probably be seen in the light of Miró's often quoted phrase: "For me a form is never something abstract; it is always the sign of something. It is always a man, a bird, or something else."¹

¹ Quoted in James Johnson Sweeney, *The Miró Atmosphere*, Barcelona, 1959.



37 *Three Birds in Space* 1939–59

Trois oiseaux dans l'espace

Oil on canvas, 38 1/8 x 51 1/8" (97 x 130 cm.)
Signed lower left: M; on reverse: MIRO // 1939 /
5/11/59 // TROIS OISEAUX // DANS L'ESPACE
Galerie Maeght, Paris
Dupin no. 891

PROVENANCE:

The artist
To present owner



In 1956 Miró began to move into the large new studio which José Luis Sert designed for him at Son Abrines in Majorca. It was a long process which involved, among other things, unpacking a large number of paintings dating back to the very beginning of his career—submitting the painter to a private retrospective of his own production. In the course of this Miró seems to have become deeply re-involved with the work he had done in the twenties. In some cases he embarked on new works which recreated the melting, fluid grounds of the original “magnetic fields” (D. 916–20). Other work re-explored the possibilities of a rapid, impulsive kind of

drawing that refused to serve as the contour for a physical object (D. 921–25). In the case of this painting, *Three Birds in Space*, he actually reworked an open-field painting from 1939, adding new signs and spots of color to its surface and redating it to bracket the two periods of its execution. The present structure of the work recalls “Sable” with the field loosely divided into four quadrants, each the bearer of a particular type of sign or image. Although the explicitness of the earlier work is gone here, the type of line that Miró has scratched into the surface integrates the isolated glyph into a field irradiated with spots of color.

38 *Solitude III* April 29, 1960

Oil on cardboard, 29 1/2 x 41 3/8" (75 x 105 cm.)

Signed lower left: M

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

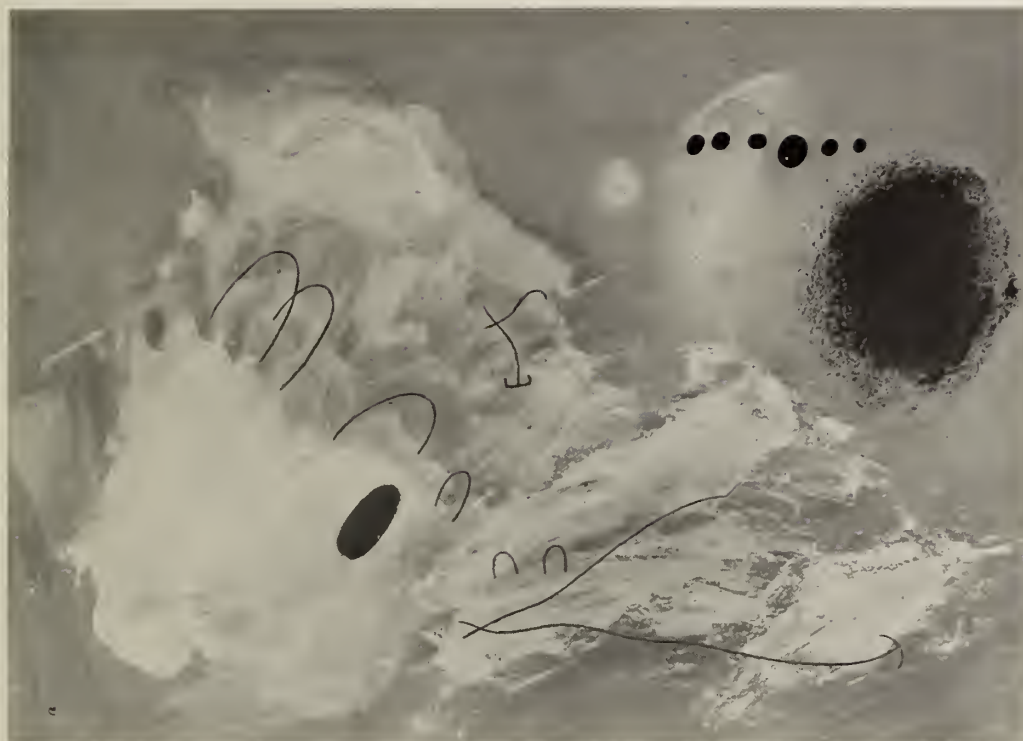
Dupin no. 905

The series of three pictures called *Solitude* appears as the distillation of Miró's period of going back and re-experiencing his past which was initiated by his move to a new studio in the late fifties (see cat. no. 57). The grounds of these works are monochrome and atmospheric (white oil on cardboard) and the drawing is far more delicate than Miró's line had been in paintings just previous to this. It is as well a drawing which imitates the gesture of writing, bringing to mind the role of *écriture* in works like *Landscape*, (*The Grasshopper*) (cat. no. 24), and "*Un oiseau poursuit...*" (cat. no. 25). The paintings of 1960 are the last ones in which Miró will allow himself the pictorial luxury of a sensuously atmospheric white ground. After this the white grounds become far more austere. They are stated simply as the surface of white primed canvas which challenges the artist to make his mark—like the blankness of the white page which Mallarmé addressed in the poem "Salut" of 1895.

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner



39 *Blue I* March 4, 1961

Bleu I

Oil on canvas, 106 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 159 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (270 × 555 cm.)

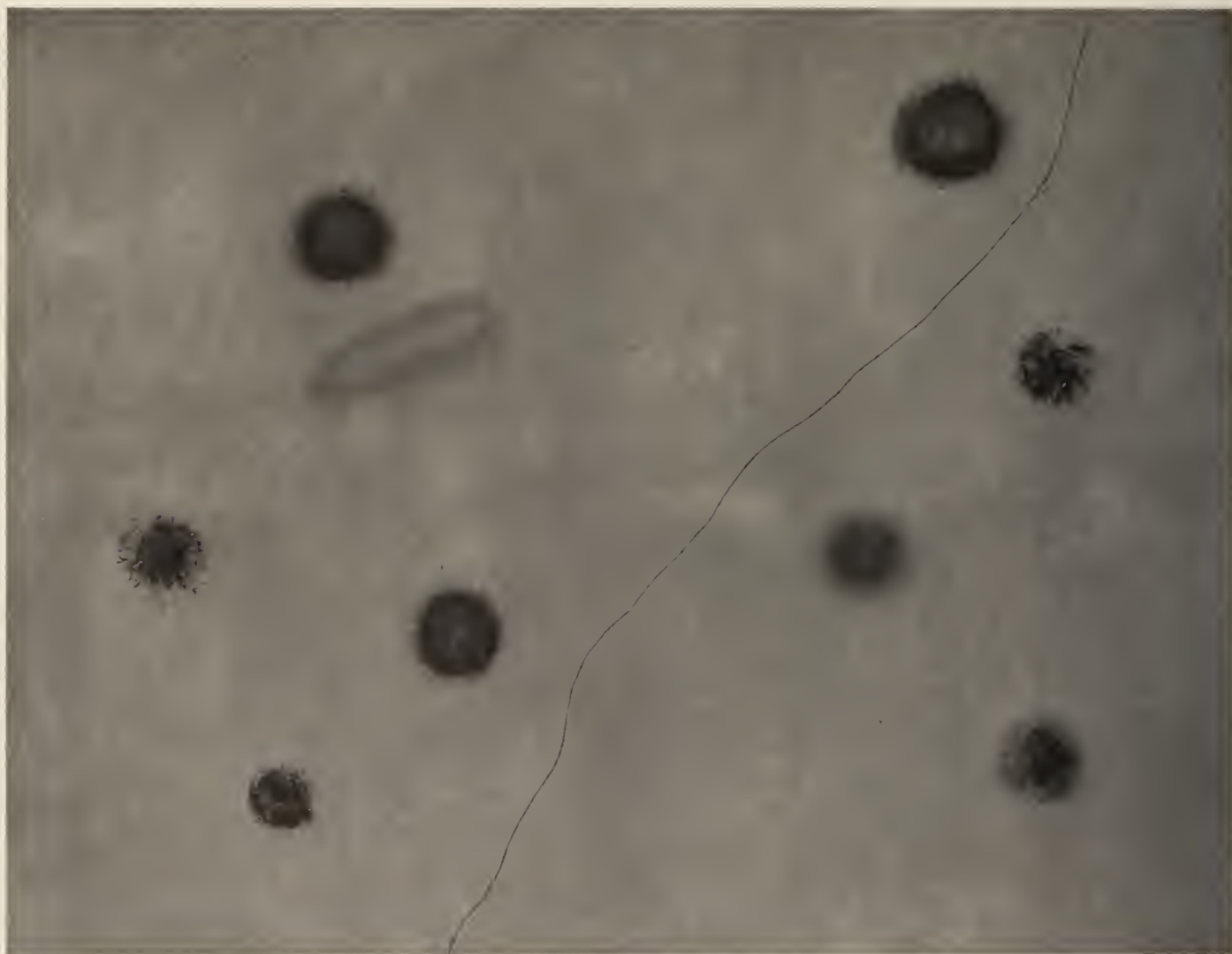
Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ. // 4/III/61 // BLEU I

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner



40 *Blue II* 1961

Bleu II

Oil on canvas, 106 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 139 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (270 × 355 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ. // 1961 // BLEU II

Galerie Maeght, Paris

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner



41 *Blue III* 1961

Bleu III

Oil on canvas, 106 1/4 x 159 3/4" (270 x 555 cm.)

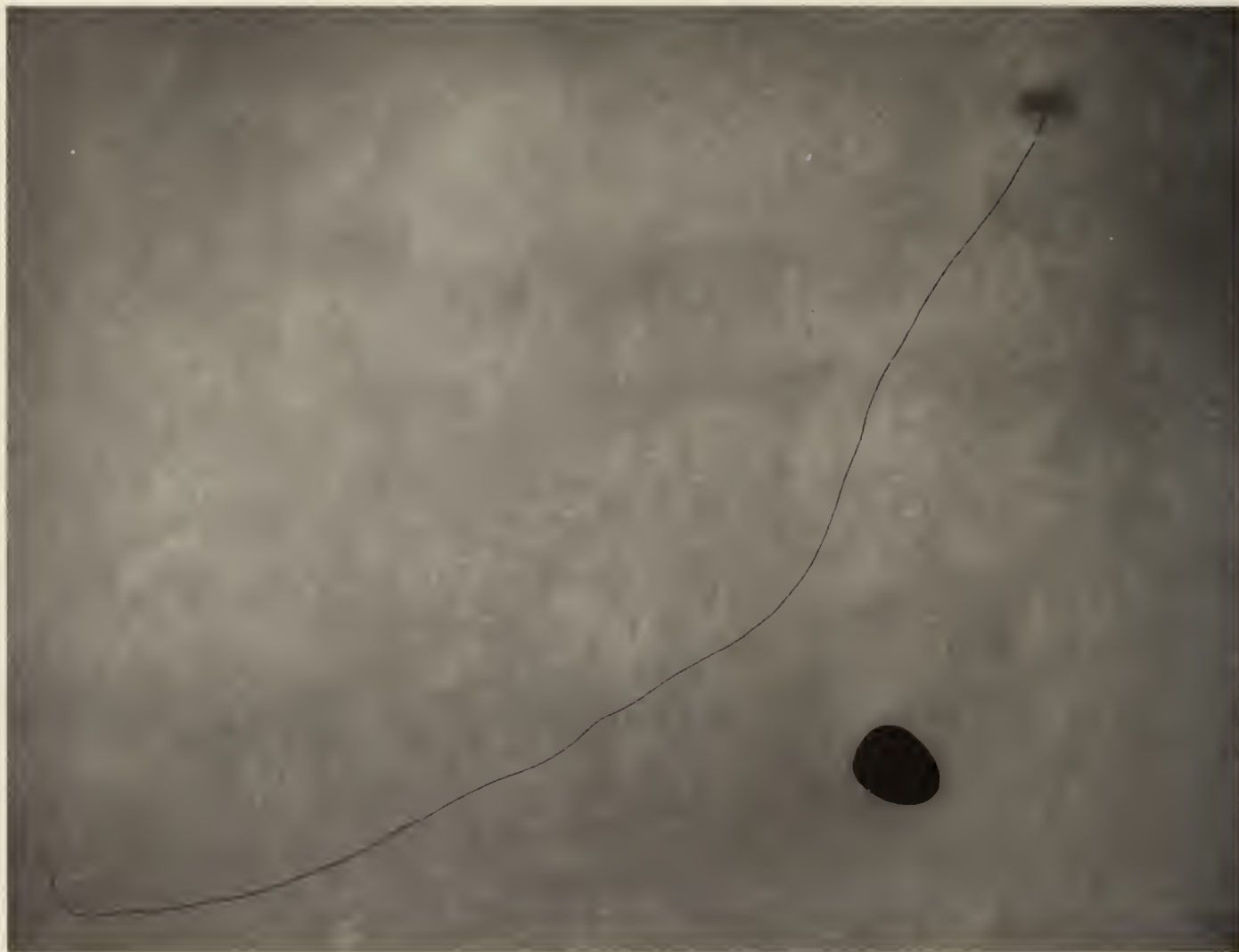
Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ. // 1961 // BLEU III

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner



With extreme economy these vast blue fields recapitulate the structural inventions of the period 1925–27. In *Blue I*, two nearly symmetrical configurations, each with four black spots, are placed on the left and right of the field. The fine diagonal which splits the field in two also implies recession into depth, reinforcing the feeling of space introduced by the luminous ground. As in “*Sable*” (cat. no. 21), one feels that signs of the elements have been distributed on the surface and have then been set spinning into depth. The configuration also recalls the structure of *The Siesta* (cat. no. 15) and “*Beaucoup de monde*” (cat. no. 29). *Blue II* is an extraordinary play on the horizon-line paintings like *Landscape* (cat. no. 26) or the 1925 *Painting* (cat. no. 18), and anticipates the red panel of the 1962 mural (cat. no. 44). *Blue III*, the sparest of this series, recalls the elevated placement of the red peasant cap in *Head of a Catalan Peasant* (cat. no. 9), as well as the spatial implications of the black vertical line. The space of *Blue III* is close, as well, to *Painting* 1927 (cat. no. 55) and to *Painting* (fig. 14).

The very color of the ground in these murals—blue—also reflects the concerns of the work of the twenties in which the open blue field had particular associations for the artist. See pp. 60–62 above.

42 *Mural Painting for a Temple I* May 18, 1962

Peinture murale I

Oil on canvas, 106 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 159 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (270 × 555 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ // PEINTURE

MURALE I // JAUNE ORANGE // 18/V/62

Galerie Maeght, Paris

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner



45 *Mural Painting for a Temple II* May 21, 1962

Peinture murale II

Oil on canvas, 106 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 139 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (270 x 355 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ // PEINTURE

MURALE II // VERT // 21/V/62

Galerie Maeght, Paris

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner



44 *Mural Painting for a Temple III* May 22, 1962

Peinture murale III

Oil on canvas, 106¹/₄ × 139³/₄" (270 × 355 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ // PEINTURE

MURALE III // ROUGE // 22/V/62

Galerie Maeght, Paris

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner

For discussion, see p. 37 above.



45 *The Birth of Day I* 1964
La Naissance du jour I

Oil on canvas, $63\frac{3}{4} \times 51\frac{1}{4}$ " (162 \times 127.6 cm.)
Signed lower left: Miró
Galerie Maeght, Paris

PROVENANCE:

The artist
To present owner



These two paintings are among the few in the exhibition which show precise examples of Miró's most typical ideograms: birds, a spiraling star, the sun and the moon. As such, they are more easily legible as depictions of

cosmic landscapes. The white grounds are somewhat unusual in the context of Miró's total œuvre. Miró usually prefers more painterly grounds, claiming that they stimulate his imagination to invent images. These flat lumi-

46 *The Birth of Day II* 1964

La Naissance du jour II

Oil on canvas, 65³/₄ × 51¹/₄" (162 × 130 cm.)

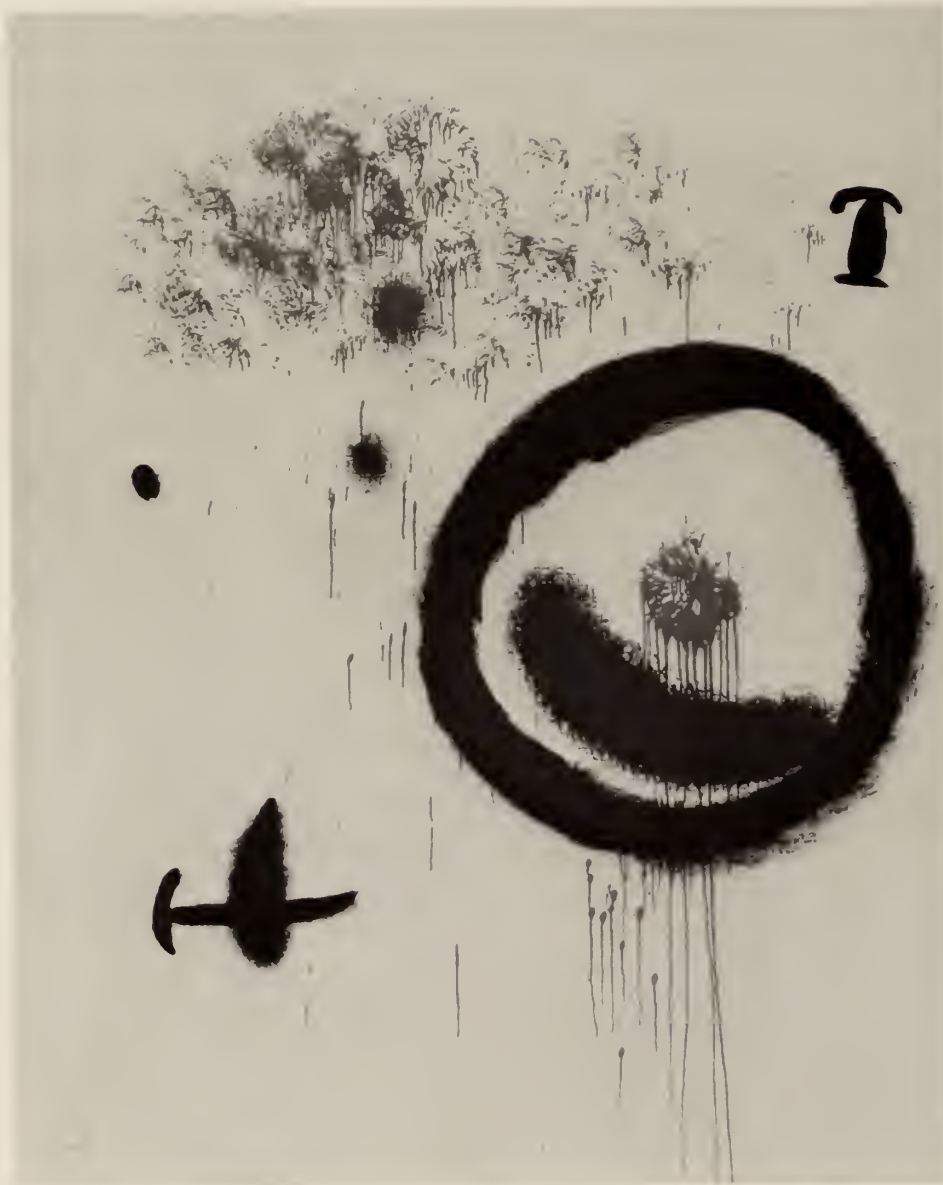
Signed lower left: Miró

Galerie Maeght, Paris

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner



nous fields are particularly successful in this pictorial endeavor, serving as a foil for the brightly colored and precisely drawn magical signs.

Metaphorically they evoke the pristine light of the birth of day, an image which is re-enforced by the radiant blue drops of dew.

- 47 *The Lark's Wing Encircled with Golden Blue*
Rejoins the Heart of the Poppy Sleeping on the
Diamond-Studded Meadow March 13, 1967
L'Aile de l'alouette encerclée du bleu d'or
rejoint le cœur du coquelicot qui dort sur la
prairie parée de diamants

Oil on canvas, 76⁷/₈ × 51¹/₄" (195 × 130 cm.)
Signed and dated on reverse: Miró 13/III/67
Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

PROVENANCE:

The artist
To present owner



48 *The Gold of the Azure* December 4, 1967
L'Or de l'azur

Oil on canvas, 80³/₄ × 69" (205 × 175 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: Miró. // 4/XII/67 // l'or
de // l'Azur

Joan Miró Contemporary Art Study Center, Barcelona

Like the landscapes of 1927 this work again juxtaposes high-key color with a strong horizontal division of the picture field. The composition is very close to the 1927 *Landscape* (cat. no. 26), with the exception that the white lacunae or breaks in the field now carry their own internal zones of color. The effect Miró achieves by these color patches haloed by white is to subsume the red and blue spots into the green and yellow grounds. See pp. 37–38 above.

The Gold of the Azure can be seen as a kind of preparation for the slightly later *Drop of Water on the Rose Colored Snow*, (cat. no. 51), where the field is far more bare and the elements more sparse and starkly juxtaposed. Only one star appears in the later work, instead of the three stars in this one. This work also sets signs for male and female in the foreground and the slashing line of the horizon at the picture's center. *The Gold of the Azure* uses heavy, gestural drawing at the bottom of the work and fine, pictographic drawing at its top, creating the same kind of continuum between ideographic and descriptive line as one sees in *Drop of Water* . . .

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner



49 *The Smile of the Star to the Twin Tree of the Plain* January 5, 1968
Le Sourire de l'étoile à l'arbre jumeau de la plaine

Oil on canvas, 68 1/2 x 85 1/2" (174 x 217 cm.)
Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ. // 5/1/68 // LE

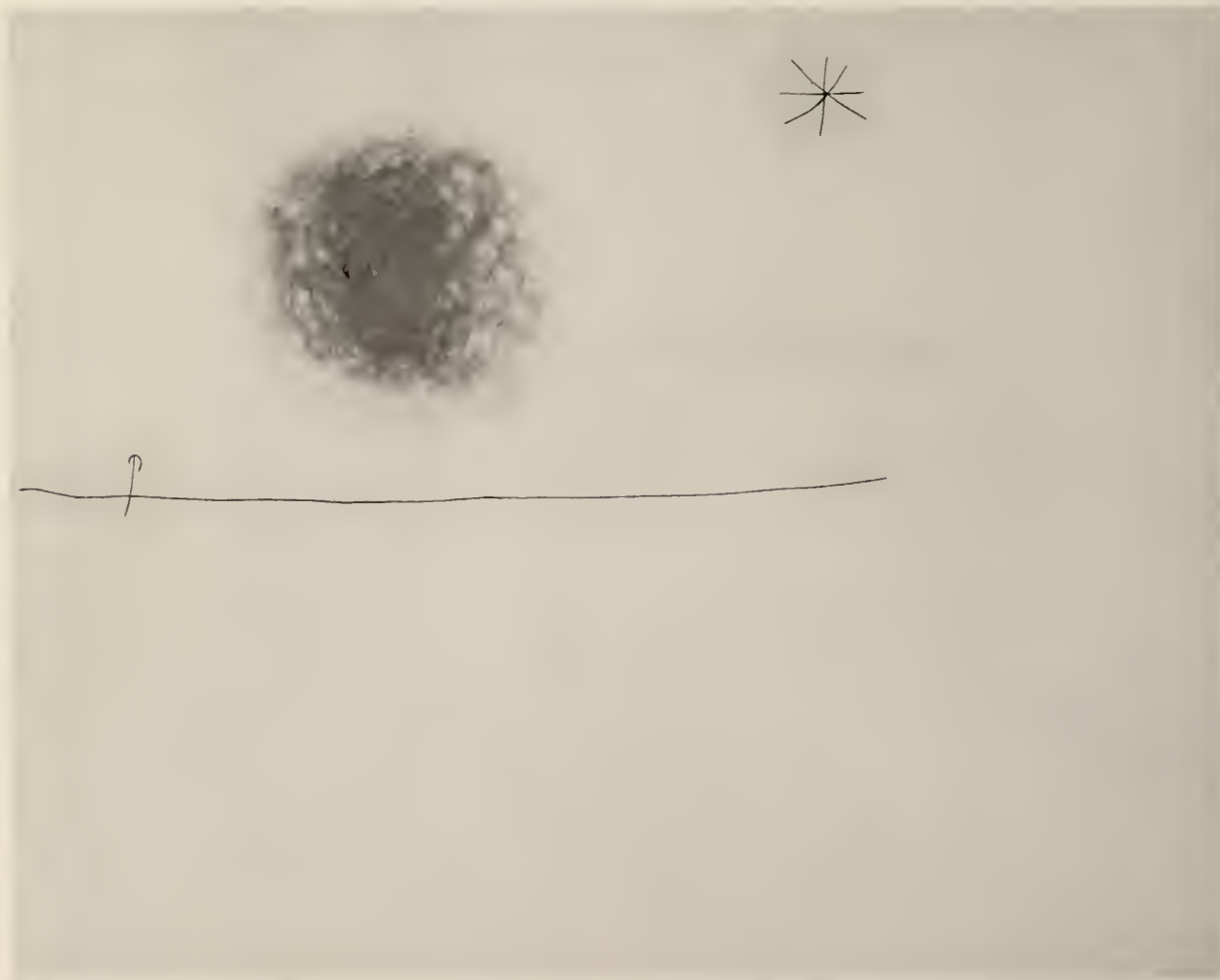
The treatment of the horizon line with a delicate stem-like sign extending over it at the far left is close to the red panel of the 1962 murals (see p. 37). But here the continuous field is white with a scarcely visible change in texture just under the line of the "horizon." This sense that the intrusion of line disturbs the field into which it enters, causing a redistribution of the surface tension of the color or pigment, is similar to that in the

SOURIRE DE L'ÉTOILE À L'ARBRE JUMEAU DE LA PLAINE
Collection Daniel Lelong, Paris

PROVENANCE:

The artist
To present owner, 1968

most radically bare paintings from the mid-twenties (see pp. 33-34). But the change in the field here has the effect of absorbing or enclosing the line into the illusioned distance, imparting to the line the quality of having created a wedge into depth as well as into the literal surface of the painting. The predominant use of white further identifies the space of the world with the primed surface of the canvas.



50 *The Flight of the Dragonfly before the Sun*
January 26, 1968
Le Vol de la libellule devant le soleil

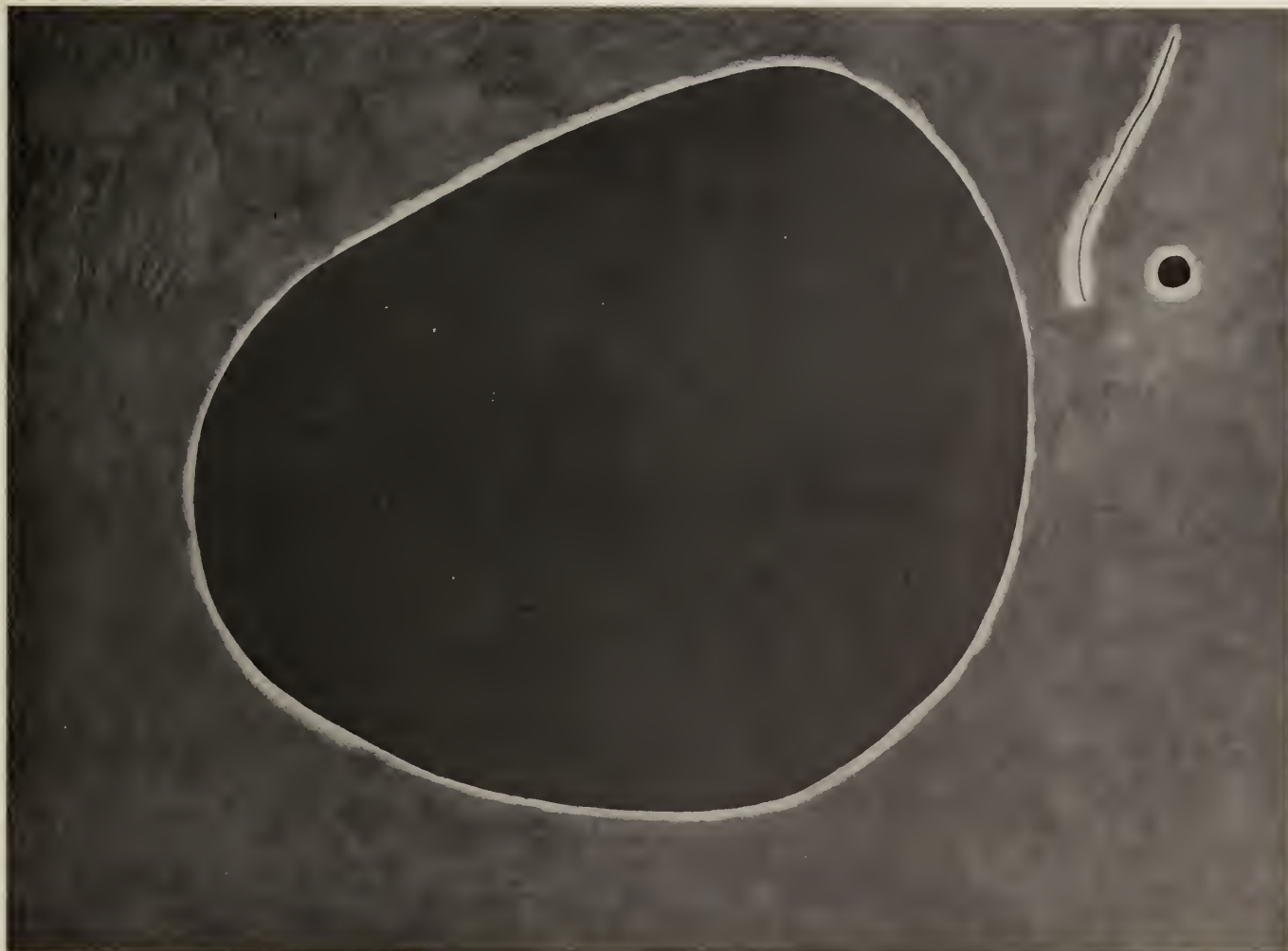
Oil on canvas, 68 1/2 x 96 1/8" (174 x 244 cm.)
Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ. // 26/1/68 // LE
VOL DE LA LIBELLULE // DEVANT LE SOLEIL
Galerie Maeght, Paris

In the early 1960s American painters like Ellsworth Kelly were making paintings structured on the action of figure-ground reversal. Two ingredients of these works were intense mat color and large, sharp-edged, emblematic shape. The effect of such painting was that shapes inside the picture field competed with one another for identification as figure. In *Flight of the Dragonfly*..., Miró uses the kind of hard-edge frontal shape and intense

PROVENANCE:

The artist
To present owner

color oppositions of sixties American painting, yet insists on maintaining the continuity of the entire field as one uninterrupted fabric. To do this he leaves a margin of white around the figures, allowing them to sink back into and be absorbed by the field. This is a technique which Matisse had devised in his own work of the early teens, when he was distressed by the way a shape of bright color, juxtaposed directly on an intensely colored



51 *Drop of Water on the Rose-Colored Snow*

February 18, 1968

Goutte d'eau sur la neige rose

Oil on canvas, 76⁷/₈ × 51¹/₄" (195 × 130 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ. 18/11/68 //

GOUTTE D'EAU SUR // LA NEIGE ROSE

Galerie Maeght, Paris

field, would appear to jump forward off that field. A further effect of these white margins at the edge of the forms is to fill the picture field with the sensation of daylight bathing the figures by creating an illusion of refracted light. In that sense the white reserved lines carry with them a certain symbolic naturalism which modifies the more abstract quality of shape and surface in this work.

Reversing the color relationship of *Hair Pursued by Two Planets* (cat. no. 52), this work suspends a splash of green on an intense orange field. As in "*Un oiseau poursuit une abeille . . .*" (cat. no. 25), Miró places graphic signs at the top and bottom of the field, suggesting a naturalistic recession by making the lower one heavier and larger. In *Drop of Water . . .* this relationship both unifies the space and creates a continuity in the mode of drawing by assimilating the gestural arcs below to the pictograph of the star above. Because of this continuity both become variants on the idea of *écriture*.

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner



52 *Hair Pursued by Two Planets* March 18, 1968

Cheveu poursuivi par deux planètes

Oil on canvas, 76⁷/₈ × 51¹/₄" (195 × 130 cm.)

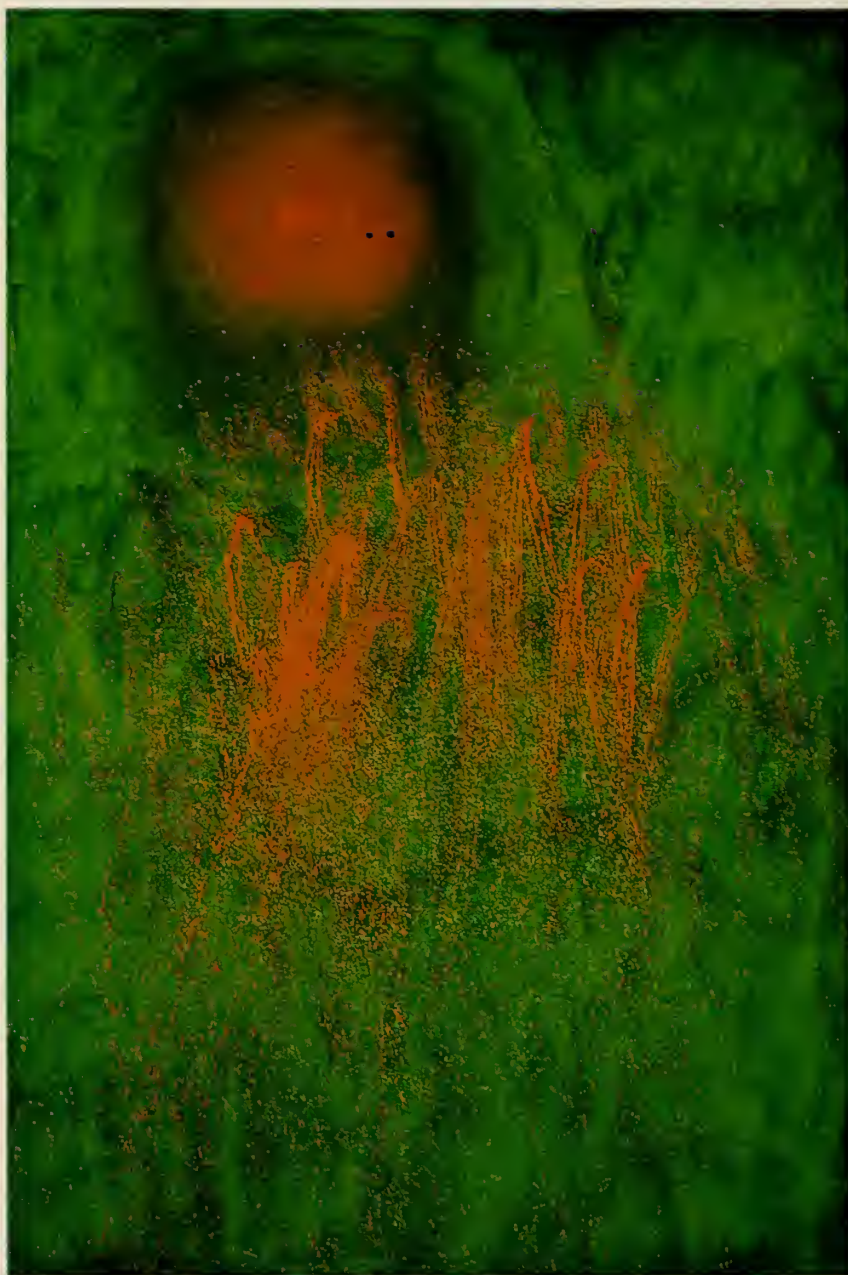
Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ. 8/III/68

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner



This is one of Miró's most extraordinary achievements as a colorist. The drawing gesture is retained in the orange splashes which affirm the verticality of the green field. But the effect of drawing as figuration is negated by the chromatic absorption of line into the total luminosity of the surface (see pp. 17–19 above).

The title of this painting reconfirms the sense that Miró is addressing himself to the emotive sources of his earlier work. Not only does he return to the theme of pursuit which he developed calligrammatically in "*Un oiseau poursuit une abeille . . .*" (cat. no. 25), but he evokes the image of hair which had come into prominence in his work of the 1920s. The painter Robert Motherwell recognized the importance of this image when he wrote an homage to Miró in the late fifties. After exclaiming about the unabashed sexuality that surfaces in Miró's art in his deployment of erotic organs in a myriad of interrelationships, Motherwell goes on:

. . . and hair!—hair is everywhere, pubic hair, underarm hair, hair on nipples, hair around the mouth, hair on the head, on the chin, in the ears, hair made of hairs that are separate, each hair waving in the wind as sensitive to touch as an insect's antenna, hairs in every hollow that grows them, hairs wanting to be caressed, erect with kisses, dancing with ecstasy. They have a life of their own, like that Divine hair God left behind in the vomit of the whore-house in Lautréamont.¹

The different kinds of hair in *The Tilled Field* (cat. no. 1), the hair in "*Le corps de ma brune*" (cat. no. 15), in "*Sourire de ma blonde*" (cat. no. 5) and in *Head of a Smoker* (cat. no. 10), the rhyming of hair with the way genitalia are depicted again and again, all of these instances confirm Motherwell's suggestion about the importance of this image for Miró's art.

¹ Robert Motherwell, "The Significance of Miró," *Art News*, vol. 58, no. 4, May 1959, p. 65.

55 *Poem I* May 17, 1968

Poème I

Oil on canvas, 80³/₄ × 68¹/₂" (205 × 174 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ // 17/V/68 // POÈME

Joan Miró Contemporary Art Study Center, Barcelona

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner

In these poem paintings, which could be considered distant relations of Miró's *tableaux-poèmes* of the twenties, the artist has combined typographic characters with his familiar repertory of cosmic signs (see cat. nos. 45-46). The typographic characters, originating in the cultural context of language and mechanistically depicted, would

ordinarily conflict with the cosmic environment into which they have been inserted. However, divested of evocative functions, they are now anonymous signs, existing not as carriers of meaning but as visual motifs and phonetic sounds.



54 *Poem III* May 17, 1968

Poème III

Oil on canvas, 80³/₄ × 68¹/₂" (205 × 174 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ // 17/V/68 //

POÈME III

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner

That these paintings do have phonetic meaning, like poetry, is reconfirmed in a discussion by Roland Penrose of a painting of the same period called *Silence*: "In a recent painting the stencilled letters of the word 'silence' are scattered over a large red patch in the centre in such a way that as we read them the repetition of the 'E'

seems to evoke distant echoes—echoes that are taken up by other signs that we find repeated with diminishing size into the distance."¹

¹ Roland Penrose, *Miró*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1970, p. 177.



55 *Letters and Numbers Attracted by a Spark I*

June 5, 1968

Lettres et chiffres attirés par une étincelle I

Oil on canvas, 57 1/2 x 41 7/8" (146 x 114 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ.//5/VI/68//

LETTRES ET CHIFFRES // ATTIRÉS PAR // UNE ÉTINCELLE I

Joan Miró Contemporary Art Study Center, Barcelona

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner



56 *Letters and Numbers Attracted by a Spark III*
June 5, 1968
Lettres et chiffres attirés par une étincelle III

Oil on canvas, 57 1/2 x 44 7/8" (146 x 114 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ.// 5/VI/68//
LETTRES ET CHIFFRES // ATTRÉS PAR // UNE ETINCELLE III
Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner



57 *Letters and Numbers Attracted by a Spark I*
June 5, 1968
Lettres et chiffres attirés par une étincelle I

Oil on canvas, 57 1/2 x 44 7/8" (146 x 114 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ./5/VI/68//
LETTRES ET CHIFFRES//ATTIRÉS PAR//UNE ÉTINCELLE V
Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner

The series *Letters and Numbers Attracted by a Spark* illustrates several pictorial and poetic concepts which are pervasive throughout the exhibition: the image of rotation or gravitation around a fixed point; the idea of a magnetic point of light (or star); the distribution of signs or constellations on a field, and the assimilation of the painting to a poem.

The original titles of these paintings were *Poème à l'accent rouge*, *Poème à l'accent vert*, etc. Hence their identification as poetry is unquestionable. However, perhaps through his interest in concrete poetry and twelve-tone music in recent years, Miró's concept of poetry has been transformed to a constellation of sounds and linguistic signs.

Despite the imageless character of this poetry, a certain metaphoric quality remains. The central spark is the poet's soul which acts as the hub or matrix of *poiesis*, mobilizing the sounds and signs out of chaos and into some meaningful order.



Paroles du poète

Oil on canvas, 51 1/4 x 76 7/8" (130 x 195 cm.)

Signed on reverse: MIRÓ // PAROLES // DU POÈTE.

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner

In 1966, Miró went to Japan for a large exhibition of his work in Tokyo and Kyoto. While there, he was impressed by a visit to a potters' village where he observed the fabrication and decoration of ceramic pots.

In the large Mediterranean farmhouse at his Majorcan home, Son Abrines, which Miró also uses as a studio, there is a pot which Miró brought back from his visit. The simple decoration is a thick black calligraphic sign like a loosely looped or knotted rope. Miró has stated his interest in the discipline and effects of the Japanese calligrapher. One can see that *Words of the Poet* was executed in that spirit, as a free yet disciplined gesture.

What is interesting to note in the context of Miró's œuvre, is the artist's concept of poetry in the sixties as a wordless gesture in a void. Whereas earlier the word was a conventional visual entity with evocative powers, here the visual entity is simply the intentionality of the act of *écriture* which, reduced to the gesture of drawing, is to be understood as a word. Miró has reduced his expression to the minimum formal means which can still produce a *tableau poème*. This is not parallel poetry but a compound of words and visual imagery presented as pure rhythm and pure color.



59 *Landscape* June 6, 1968

Paysage

Oil on canvas, 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ \times 76 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (150 \times 195 cm.)

Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ. // 6/VI/68 // PAYSAGE

Joan Miró Contemporary Art Study Center, Barcelona

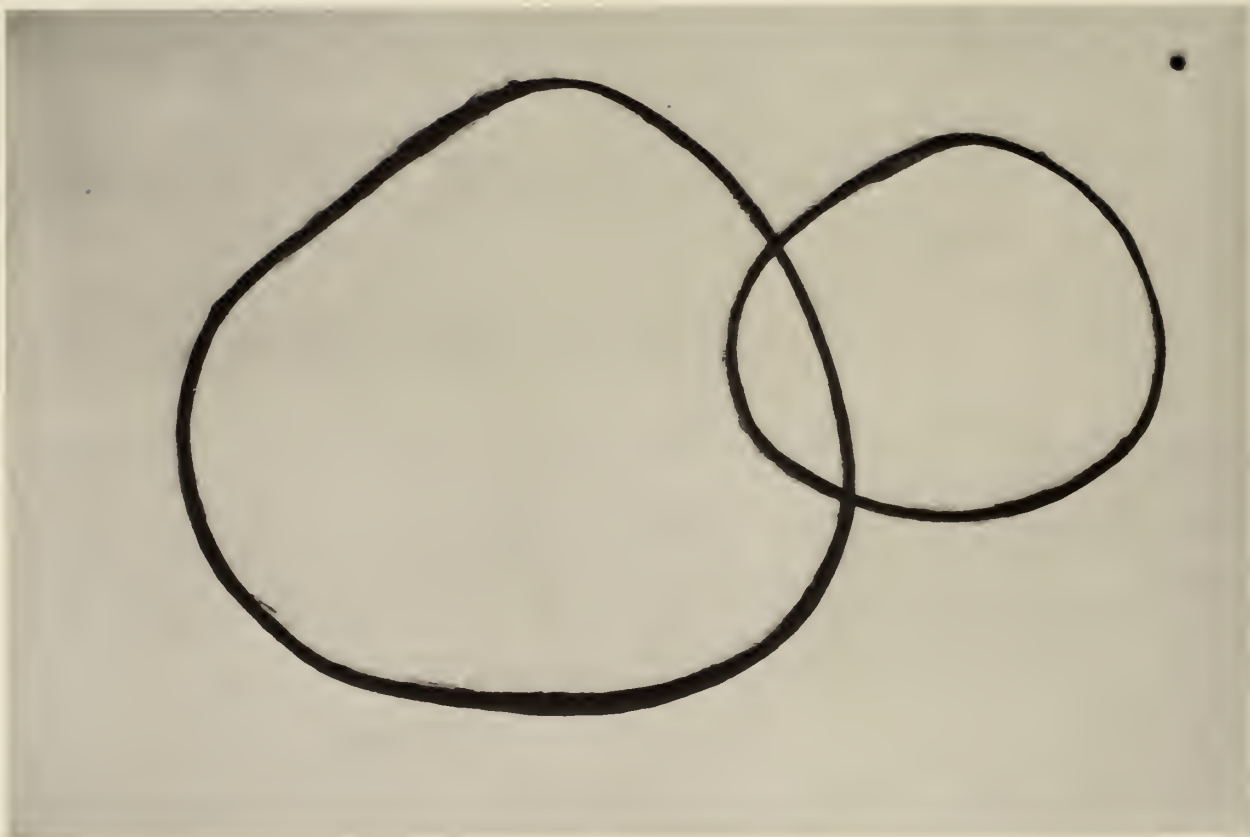
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The artist

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It is almost impossible not to see this work as a kind of after-image of the 1925 *Painting* (cat. no. 18) in which a white dot appears as the solitary figure on a blue field. *Landscape* reverses this by suspending a dot of blue on a white ground. Whereas the earlier work created a sense of atmosphere by means of the unevenness and liquidity of the field, making the tiny indication of planet or star extremely precise, the later one keeps the ground completely flat and even. Only the star, with its slightly blurred edges, introduces a notion of natural light onto the stark whiteness of the surface.





60 *Man and Woman in front of the Azure*
June 6, 1968
Homme et femme devant l'azur

Oil on canvas, 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ \times 76 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (130 \times 195 cm.)

The title and the radical emptiness of this painting suggest that Miró was thinking of Mallarmé and the poet's interpretation of the distant and impenetrable *azur*.¹ In keeping with this poetic reference, the man and woman are tenuous forms clinging together in the nothingness of human existence. From this void, they contemplate an inaccessible point of blue in the infinite distance.

Although *Man and Woman in front of the Azure* is quite close in composition and motifs to *Painting*, 1930 (cat. no. 36), it is entirely different in tone. In contrast to the voluptuous color found in the early painting, the late painting is distinctly ascetic. Despite this difference, the identification of the motifs in the late painting may provide some indication of Miró's intentions in *Painting*, 1930.

¹ See p. 61 this catalogue.

Signed and dated on reverse: MIRÓ // 6/VI/68 //
HOMME ET FEMME // DEVANT L'AZUR
Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

PROVENANCE:

The artist

To present owner

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Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz, New York: no. 1, 17, 27, 55, fig. 19

Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz, New York from "A l'ombre de la Guerre Civile, L'Art Catalan du X^e au XV^e siècle au Musée du Jeu de Paume de Tuileries, March-April 1957," *Cahiers d'Art*, nos. 8-10, 1956, p. 221: fig. 5

Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz, New York from Jacques Damas, ed. *La Révolution typographique depuis Stéphane Mallarmé*, Geneva, 1966, pp. 1, 16, 18, 20, 22, 50, 59, 54; figs. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 18, 20, 28

Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz, New York from Alfred Jarry, *l'bu Roi*, Paris, Fasquelle Editeurs, 1959, frontispiece: fig. 15

Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz, New York from Juan Peruchó, *Joan Miró and Catalonia*, New York, 1968, p. 80, nos. 49-52: fig. 52

Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz, New York from *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no. 5, April 15, 1925, p. 27: fig. 11

Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz, New York from *SIC*, nos. 47-48, June 15 and 30, 1919, p. 572: fig. 51

Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz, New York from *Les Soirées de Paris*, May 15, 1914: fig. 16

Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz, New York from Folch I. Torres, "Les Miniatures des commentaires aux apocalypses de Geronà et de Seu d'Urgell," *Cahiers d'Art*, nos. 7-8, 1951, p. 550, 555: figs. 25, 27

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York: no. 16, 54, 60

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EXHIBITION 72/7

4,000 copies of this catalogue designed by Malcolm Grear
have been printed by Brüder Hartmann, Berlin
in September 1972 for the Trustees of The Solomon
R. Guggenheim Foundation on the occasion of the
exhibition

Joan Miró: Magnetic Fields

THE COLLEGE OF THE SOUTHERN CROSS, 1071 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY